

Cold Vision: Inspired by “The Snow Queen”

Exegesis

Inspired by “The Snow Queen”: subversion, status quo and structure

Novel

Cold Vision

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STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

This thesis is entirely my own work. Any ideas or theories not my own have been properly referenced.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'S. Lyons'.

Sara Lyons

15 March 2012

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Abstract

Exegesis

The exegesis argues that contemporary women writers continue to find inspiration in the fairy tale, drawing on its form, themes, characters, symbolism and motifs to tell new stories. In particular, the exegesis claims that writers turn to the fairy tale for three broad purposes, two of which are contradictory, thereby suggesting the elasticity of the fairy tale as a structure. Firstly, fairy tales are used normatively, as a means of providing a structure that preserves traditional values, roles and politics (supporting the status quo). Secondly, fairy tales are used subversively to provide a structure that challenges ideas and assumptions around traditional values, usually associated with gender (subverting the status quo). And, thirdly, fairy tales are used as a structural formula, framework or technical tool to enhance characterisation, mood, atmosphere and meaning. The exegesis examines the way three writers, A.S. Byatt, Mercedes Lackey and Francesca Block employ Hans Christian Andersen's "The Snow Queen" as a framework for their fiction. Finally, I subject my own novel, "Cold Vision", to the same analysis, aiming to articulate the ideas and knowledge that were symbolically or indirectly expressed in the story, decoding the novel and exposing its themes and symbolism to discussion.

Novel

When Evon Carr was a child, she believed in the power of her dreams. When her mother dies from cancer, Evon believes her dreams are responsible and vows never to dream again. As an adult, Evon works as a compliance officer for the Department of Immigration and Citizenship where she has learnt to be completely rational. She performs her duties with inhuman objectivity, remaining untouched by the human tragedy that she witnesses.

Life starts to change for Evon on the day that her team raids a brothel and she detains an African healer dubbed "Mr Lucky", a man who never speaks. Instead, he gives Evon beads from his hair. Each bead unlocks a memory that takes Evon on a journey back to her childhood. With the help of her immigration team leader, Daniel Bell, Evon's unsympathetic approach to the people she encounters begins to change.

When a woman commits suicide while being deported, Evon is forced to reconsider her hard-line approach to immigration enforcement and to come to terms with her own past. She returns to Mr Lucky, takes the last bead from him, and accepts her own guilt for her mother's death. Finally, she is able to dream again.

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Inspired by “The Snow Queen”: subversion, status quo and structure

Introduction

Contemporary writers often return to the fairy tale for inspiration for their work. Writers in a wide range of genres have been influenced by the form, themes, characters, motifs and symbolism of these stories and have employed them within their own texts. By adopting a fairy tale structure, a writer is able to draw upon a suite of motifs, cultural symbols and themes that are already known to readers. The fairy tale structure can act as a short cut, allowing readers to bring their own expectations of the fairy tale to the contemporary text.

These expectations can be seen to constitute a kind of intertextuality that serves to connect the two texts. Intertextuality is a term first introduced by French semiotician Julia Kristeva in the late 1960s. She argued that any text is constructed of a mosaic of quotations and that any text is a product of the absorption and transformation of another (66). At a basic level, intertextuality occurs when a later text contains traces of an earlier text. In this instance, the fairy tale shapes the contemporary text allowing the reader's assumptions about the earlier text to influence his or her reading of the newer one. Roland Barthes argues that: “Any text is a new tissue of past citations. Bits of code, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social languages, et cetera, pass into the text and are redistributed within it, for there is always language before and around the text” (39). Kristeva and Barthes argue that all texts contain references to existent texts. This use of other texts is complex and may or may not be a conscious process on the part of

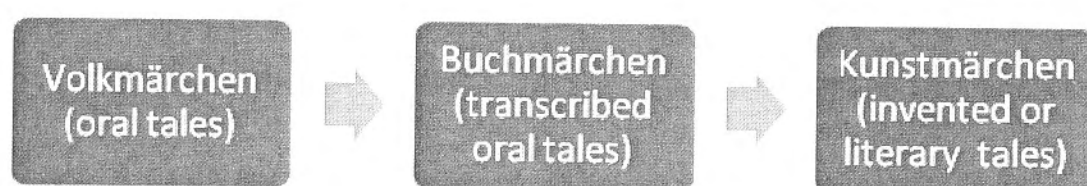
the writer or the reader. The texts that I plan to examine, however, have all consciously used a text, "The Snow Queen", a literary fairy tale, as a framework for the construction of a new narrative. My focus on "The Snow Queen" in this exegesis stems from my use of Andersen's literary fairytale as the underlying structure for my own novel, "Cold Vision".

According to Jack Zipes, one view of fairy tales is that they derive from an oral tradition where story tellers told folk tales to small groups of people who actively interacted with the narrator to create narratives (Happily Ever After 3). So, at their simplest, fairy tales are based on oral folk tales, and are transcriptions of original stories. Building on the oral tradition of the folk tale, and the written tradition of the fairy tale, is the "literary fairy tale". It is the latter form, the literary fairy tale that is the focus of this exegesis.

It is difficult to find a recognised definition of the fairy tale. As Jack Zipes writes: "...fairy tales have been defined in so many ways that it boggles the mind that they can be categorised as a genre." (Oxford Companion xv). However, for the purpose of this exegesis I employ Maria Tatar's definition that a fairy tale is: "... a narrative associated with oral and literary traditions [which is] above all a narrative set in a fictional world where preternatural events and supernatural intervention are taken wholly for granted" (33).

This definition is broad and in order to examine Andersen's tale, it is necessary to explain that there are a range of types of fairy tale. Tatar posits a spectrum of fairy

tale typology, ranging from oral tales or folk tales that often feature earthy realism and that have been transmitted orally, to transcribed oral tales that have been recorded, to tales that have been written with no direct history linking them to the oral tradition (33). She devised a diagram to summarise her typology, and a version of this diagram adapted by Elizabeth Wanning Harries can be found as follows (7):



On this spectrum, writers such as the Grimm brothers are to be found located within the category of “transcribed oral tales”, and Andersen’s stories can be categorised as invented or literary tales. The Kunstmärchen or literary tale differs from the tales based in the oral tradition in a number of ways. Jens Tismar argues that the literary tale is different from the oral folk tale in that it is written by a single identifiable author; it has a single fixed form and it is an artificial creative construct (1–6). Andersen’s tale can be seen to conform to this definition. It is written by a single identifiable author; its origin can easily be traced to a single volume of stories, and it is an artificial or synthetic construct. However, Tismar’s assertion that the literary fairy tale is fixed in form may be questionable. Certainly, in contemporary times, reimaginings and rewritings of literary fairy tales have become very common. For example, Disney has reworked not only folk tales but also some literary tales including Andersen’s “The Little Mermaid”, produced by Disney in 1989.

Over time, fairy tales, even literary fairy tales, undergo alterations that reflect changing mores, politics and cultures. Certain fairy stories based on the oral tradition exist in numerous forms, for example, “Little Red Riding Hood” (“Le Petit Chaperon Rouge”) was published by Charles Perrault in 1697 and the Grimm brothers published their version “Rotkaeppchen” in 1812. The structures, symbols and meanings of fairy tales have been adopted and transformed for a range of purposes. These include the commercial: for example, a 2011 advertising campaign for GHD hair straighteners featuring Katy Perry as variously Sleeping Beauty and Snow White; and the erotic, for example pornography featuring Little Red Riding Hood. These uses of the fairy tale can be seen as examples of what John Fiske calls “vertical intertextuality”, that is, where a primary text such as a television show references other texts of a different type (109–110). An example of this can be found in the animated television show, *The Simpsons*, which often features episodes that reference other texts, including plays and musicals. However, this exegesis focuses on what John Fiske terms “horizontal intertextuality”, that is, when a particular type of text references a text or an element of a text (for example, genre or character) at the same level (110).

Modern writers who have adopted fairy tale structures are not confined to any one genre or mode of fiction writing. Writers from a wide range of fiction genres, including writers of romantic fiction, feminist literature, fantasy, magical realism, have been inspired by fairy tales and chosen to use fairy tale structures to frame their narratives. Fairy tale frameworks are also found in a variety of literary forms, including the novel, novella, the short story and poetry. Contemporary writers have

reshaped original fairy tale narratives to convey their own messages —messages that are deeply embedded in their own ideologies and cultures. As Cristina Bacchilega notes: “Creative writers seem equally inspired by the fairy tale, which provides them with well-known material pliable to political, erotic, or narrative manipulation” (3). Authors such as Angela Carter, Joachim Ringelnatz and Anne Sexton have all engaged in various rewritings and re-imaginings of fairy tales.

Over time, many forms of narrative are shaped by the fairy tale, inspired by it and transformed by association with it. Stith Thompson proposes that it is the basic plot structure of the tale that is the enduring element of the fairy tale, rather than its style or narrative purpose: “For the plot structure of the tale is much more stable and more persistent than its form” (10). Indeed, an examination of modern reinterpretations of fairy tales confirms the significance of plot. The works I discuss have all retained the basic plot structure of the story upon which they are based, but the style and narrative purposes are diverse and very different to those of Andersen’s original tale. As Lisa M. Fiander comments:

One of the most intriguing dimensions of fairy tales is their flexibility, as is evidenced by their long history of being shaped and rewritten and reinterpreted in order to transmit messages or disseminate ideologies. (163)

The mutable and adaptable nature of fairy tales may be the very trait that ensures their longevity. As Thompson in his canonical work on fairy tales, *The Folktale*, writes:

As stories transcend differences of age or of place and move from the ancient world to ours, or from ours to a primitive society, they often undergo protean transformations in style and narrative purpose. (10)

It is not surprising, then, that contemporary writers have been inspired by “The Snow Queen” to produce narratives for varied purposes. Feminist writers, such as A.S. Byatt, have adapted the story to explore contemporary political issues concerning gender. Writers, such as Mercedes Lackey, in the field of speculative fiction, have adopted the structure of “The Snow Queen” to imbue their stories with an “otherworldly” quality or as a device to support the reader’s suspension of disbelief. Writers like Francesca Lia Block have been inspired by “The Snow Queen” to make strong social commentary. In this thesis, I analyse the ways that these authors use “The Snow Queen” to explore ideas, and to reinterpret and re-imagine fairy tales.

In the final chapter, I examine my own novel, “Cold Vision”, with a view to analysing how “The Snow Queen” influenced my story. “Cold Vision” was inspired by the time that I spent employed as a compliance officer for the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. In the exegesis, I explain how “Cold Vision” uses the framework of “The Snow Queen” to address issues that cause *angst* in Australian society, in particular, issues around immigration, otherness and social cohesion. I explain how using a fairy tale for inspiration both assisted my writing and hindered it. In particular, I shall examine the difficulties that ensued when I switched the genders of two characters in the source story, Kay and Gerda. By doing this, I had thought to overcome preconceived ideas of feminine emotionality, however, an

unanticipated consequence of the gender swap was that it rewrote Andersen's story in accordance with the traditional idea that it is only men who play active roles, rescuing female victims from peril.

Throughout the exegesis, I argue that there are three main purposes for which women writers employ fairy tale frameworks in their fiction: to subvert, to support and to structure. I contend that the argument that women writers only use fairy tale structure to explore gender inequality is inadequate. Rather, I show that women employ fairy tale structure for other purposes that are often non-political in nature or not consciously related to gender issues.

Chapter 1: The fairy tale in literary criticism and theory

Historically, fairy tales have many purposes. These purposes can include preserving traditional gender roles and class structures, controlling and guiding behaviour and transmitting cultural heritage. Many critics have examined fairy tales' purposes, themes, motifs, symbolism, politics and forms. Zipes outlines a number of literary approaches taken in regard to the literary fairy tale, including the folklorist approach, the structuralist approach, the literary approach, the psychoanalytic approach, the historicist, sociological, and ideological approaches and the feminist approach. All these approaches aim to provide interpretations of the fairy tale to suit various critical and ideological purposes (Oxford Companion 17). Although none of these approaches have attempted to categorise the ways that modern writers have employed tales as a framework for their fiction, it is useful to examine the methods that have been used to analyse fairy tales. By examining previous approaches, it is possible to provide a context for the analysis of why contemporary writers continue to turn to the fairy tale form as a source of inspiration.

Antti Aarne, a Finnish folklorist, provided one of the earliest attempts to apply literary theory to the fairy tale when he developed a motif-based approach to the classification of folk tales. The Aarne-Thompson classification system, published in 1910, was developed by Aarne and later translated and expanded upon by Stith Thompson. A morphological approach, the Aarne-Thompson system classifies fairy tales in accordance with themes or motifs, for example, Animal Tales, Fairy Tales, Religious Tales, Realistic Tales, Jokes and Anecdotes, Formula Tales, Ordinary

Folk Tales and Unclassified Tales. Under this system, "The Snow Queen" is categorised as an "Ordinary Folk Tale". Aarne did not examine modern rewritings of fairy tales or posit any reasons why modern writers would choose to adopt a fairy tale structure for their work. His focus was on simply classifying fairy tales according to type.

In 1918, Kaarle Krohn, also a Finnish scholar, published *Kalevalankysymyksiä* (Kalevala Questions), a two-volume work examining Finnish folk poetry. Eight years later, he added examples of folk tales to this work and published it as *Die folkloristische Arbeitsmethode (Folklore Methodology)*. *The Folklore Methodology* is considered a standard reference work for what has come to be known as the Finnish, or historical-geographical method of analysing fairy tales. Zipes argues that this method is based on a number of assumptions, for instance, that a fairy tale can only be understood when all known variants of the tale have been examined, and that there is an "ur-text" for each fairy tale, a concept that implies that for every contemporary version of a fairy tale there is a single original "pure" and "authentic" version (Oxford Companion 17). Clearly, Krohn's approach is of little utility when examining a literary fairy tale like Andersen's "The Snow Queen" as there is no "pure" and "authentic" version of the story that predates Andersen's telling of it.

In 1928, Vladimir Propp, a Russian scholar, published *Morphology of Fairy Tales*, a work that only became widely influential when translated into English in 1958.

Propp applied the principles of Russian formalism to the analysis of Russian folk tales, emphasising the functional role of literary devices rather than addressing and analysing psychological, sociological, cultural and historical factors (Erich 172). Propp's approach, known as structuralism, analyses folk tales from a "scientific" perspective, with an emphasis on those elements of folk tales that he considers to be fixed and invariable. As Max Lüthi writes: "[Propp] sees the structure of folktales as constant and invariable and their content as variable" (126). As such, Propp's approach is unable to engage with those elements of the folk tale that are variable, for example, form and content, but which also intrinsic to the conveyance of meaning. Even today, Propp's approach, with its focus on the structure of the fairy tale provides a useful tool for the examination of the fairy tale structure. However, Propp, too, provides little insight into why a modern writer would use fairy tale structure.

In the 1970s, there was a resurgence of literary interest in the fairy tale with a multitude of approaches to interpretation coming to the fore, including the psychoanalytical approach, historical/sociological/ideological approaches and the feminist approach. The psychoanalytic approach is based on the works of Jung and Freud and as such focuses on the symbolism inherent in the text and on the universality of meaning within the text. Two notable critical scholars during this period were Maria Luise von Franz, who examined fairy tales from a Jungian perspective, and Bruno Bettelheim, who applied a Freudian approach to the interpretation of fairy tales.

Bettelheim, an Austrian-born American, published *The Uses of Enchantment* in 1976. He focuses on the ways that fairy tales carry messages to the conscious, preconscious and unconscious mind of the child, seeing fairy tales as playing a vital role in communicating with the budding ego of the child and encouraging its development (6). Bettelheim's focus is firmly on the fairy tale in relation to the development of the child, proposing an intrinsic connection between the genre and the state of childhood.

Von Franz, an Austrian psychotherapist, worked closely with Carl Jung until his death in 1961. In 1970, von Franz published *An Introduction to the Interpretation of Fairy Tales* (later known as *The Interpretation of Fairy Tales*). This book was based on a series of lectures that von Franz had delivered in English during the 1950s at the C.G. Jung Institute. Von Franz interpreted fairy tales as expressions of the collective unconscious and therefore as a basis for understanding the patterns and structures of the human psyche. Both the Jungian and the Freudian approaches to understanding fairy tales share a common limitation— they assume that meaning is embedded in the human psyche, universal and independent of other influencing factors, for example, historical, ethnological, folkloristic and political.

Superficially, von Franz and Bettelheim's psychoanalytical approach seems very useful in determining why authors employ fairy tale structure when writing contemporary works, and indeed their work is referenced throughout. However, there are limitations in this approach, as it posits that motivation is subconscious,

and my focus in my exegesis is on the conscious reasons that writers turn to the fairy tale.

In the 1970s, Jack Zipes became a dominant figure in relation to the interpretation of fairy tales. Zipes, a retired American Professor of German, has written extensively on the fairy tale in a career that spans the 1970s to the present. He focuses on the relationship between fairy tales and historical, cultural and ideological change, in particular how the meanings of fairy tales have been progressively re-shaped as they have been appropriated by various cultural and social institutions (Oxford Companion 20).

In the 1980s, scholars turned to more historicist, sociological and ideological approaches, a trend that continued well into the 1990s. Zipes argued that there are two main historical approaches to the fairy tale. The first approach emphasises the social and cultural purposes that fairy tales serve within the communities from which they originated (Oxford Companion 19). This approach is associated with scholars such as Nitschke, Kahlo and Sherf. The second approach emphasises how textual variants of fairy tales reflect the cultural and historical contexts in which they are written, for example, Ruth Bottigheimer (1986) has explored the ways that changing views of gender have resulted in the modern re-imagining of fairy tales that portray women and girls as less passive than in earlier versions. Zipes, who takes a predominantly Marxist approach to the interpretation of fairy tales, has also taken this view, arguing that folk tales originally played a subversive role in society

but that later versions were appropriated by the dominant culture and used in an attempt by the ruling class to control, contain and regulate communities (Oxford Companion 20).

The fairy tale in contemporary women's literature

The thirty-year period from 1970s to the late 1990s represented a time of great interest in and engagement with the fairy tale form, particularly from feminist writers and critics. It is during this period that the bulk of criticism on the fairy tale was written, and it is also during this time that a large body of fiction inspired by fairy tales was produced, in particular, stories that subverted fairy tales, for example, feminist rewritings and fractured fairy tales. Many, mostly female, writers turned to the "reimagining" or "reinventing" of traditional fairy tales to examine perceived gender bias within the texts.

At this time, according to Zipes (Oxford Companion 20) and Donald Haase (15), feminist theorists basically took two opposing positions in relation to the portrayal of gender within fairy tales. The first position held by a small group of critics was that some fairy tales, for example, "The Snow Queen", portray strong, resourceful and positive images of women. Alison Lurie, in the 1970s, argued that fairy tales can play a role in women's liberation as they often portray strong women. In her view, feminists should approve of fairy tales as they depict "competent, resourceful and powerful female characters" (42). Lurie claimed that there were a large number of little known fairy tales that portrayed active, powerful women. In her view, male

compilers and editors had neglected these tales, suppressing their publication and thus censoring them from readers. The second and more dominant position was that fairy tales present negative role models of femininity, that women in fairy tales are portrayed as weak, passive, helpless and submissive. Feminists argued that stories like “Cinderella” or “Little Red Riding Hood” showed women to be victims, lacking in agency, domestically orientated and powerless. An early critic who took this position, for instance, was Marcia R. Lieberman in her essay, “‘Some Day My Prince Will Come’: Female Acculturation Through the Fairy Tale.”

During the decade of the seventies, the second approach to the interpretation of fairy tales dominated critical discourse. According to Haase, early feminist criticism focussed on the way that women were represented within fairy tales and that effects that these representations had on gender identity in children (16). Critics who took this view included Andrea Dworkin, Susan Brownmiller and Mary Daly. Even as late as 1979, Karen Rowe would write:

“...subconsciously women may transfer from fairy tales into real life cultural norms which exalt passivity, dependency, and self-sacrifice as a female's cardinal virtues. In short, fairy tales perpetuate the patriarchal status quo by making female subordination seem a romantically desirable, indeed an inescapable fate” (209).

In the 1980s, feminist arguments around fairy tales became more nuanced. The view developed that fairy tales did not simply shape feminine behaviour but that the interaction between the story and women was more subtle and complex than originally conceived. For example, Colette Dowling's book, *The Cinderella*

Complex: Women's Hidden Fear of Independence, published in 1981, argued that the fairy tale reflected society's position towards women rather than merely shaping it. Similarly, in 1980, Linda Chervin and Mary Neill in *The Woman's Tale: A Journey of Inner Exploration* aimed to encourage women to examine their own responses to the fairy tales that they had been exposed to as children. Around about this time, many new collections of fairy tales were compiled with a feminist focus. These anthologies, for example, Ethel Johnston Phelps's *The Maid in the North: Feminist Folk Tales from around the World*, tended to feature stories that presented extremely positive images of women. The women in these stories tended to portray only admirable characteristics that countered those found in traditional tales; they were brave, good, resourceful, independent, active, intelligent and so on. However, later in the decade, a second wave of fairy tale anthologies presented a more nuanced and varied view of the ways that women were represented in fairy tales (Haase 21). In 1990, Angela Carter, for example, in *The Old Wives' Fairy Tale Book*, presented female protagonists who were extremely diverse, ranging from intelligent and brave through to cruel, macabre and ridiculous.

From the 1990s onwards, there has been an increasing understanding of the interconnections between fairy tales and feminist theory. For instance, Marina Warner in *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and their Tellers* (1994) examines women's role in preserving and transmitting fairy tales. She also examines the role of women within the tales themselves. In this book, she places women in relation to the oral tradition of the folk tale and the literary tradition of the

fairy tale. Her focus is on a feminist reclaiming of fairy tales, emphasising that the original tellers of fairy tales were women. She stresses that women played a critical role in the preservation and transmission of fairy tales. Her perspective is of particular relevance to this exegesis, as all the works I examine are written by women, including my own. From this perspective, Warner's argument that it is women who are the originators of fairy tales is relevant to my analysis, as my research shows that women still play this role.

A review of the literature shows that in the last decade, feminist scholars are still examining the fairy tale, for example, in 2001, Susan Sellers published *Myth and Fairy Tale in Contemporary Women's Fiction*. Sellers explores the works of women who have drawn on, rewritten and re-imagined fairy tales, for example, A.S. Byatt, Michele Roberts and Angela Carter. In 2004, Donald Haase published a collection of essays, *Fairy Tales and Feminism: A New Approach*. This work included essays by Bottigheimer, Lewis Seifert, Jeannine Blackwell, Elizabeth Wanning Harries, Kay Stone, Patricia Anne Obder de Baubeta, Fiona Mackintosh, Lee Haring, Cristina Bacchilega and Cathy Lynn Preston. Stephen Benson, the editor of the 2008 book, *Contemporary Fiction and the Fairy Tale*, is another notable scholar who writes about the contemporary use of fairy tales. This work includes seven essays that focus on contemporary authors who use the tropes, structures, and intertexts of fairy tales in their writing. In this work, Sarah Gamble explores the themes of intertextuality and gender in Angela Carter's stories. Andrew Teverson explores Salman Rushdie's works. Elizabeth Wanning Harries outlines how the work of A.S. Byatt has been shaped by fairy tales. Sharon Wilson explores the

work of Margaret Atwood and the way she focuses on fairy tale intertexts in her fiction. Merja Makinen's essay focuses on the fairy tale fiction of Jeanette Winterson, exploring them from a postmodern perspective. Cristina Bacchilega, in her essay, explores creolisation and the representation of orality in her work. Interestingly, the bulk of this work focuses on literary rewritings of fairy tales by women authors, however an exception to this is *Fairy Tales: A New History*, a 2009 work by Bottigheimer that posits that the theory that fairy tales originate in the oral tradition is a misconception. These are only a few examples of contemporary scholars who continue to explore the fairy tale; there are many more, for example, Marina Warner, Diane Purkiss, Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère and D.L. Ashliman.

Feminists have chiefly employed the fairy tale structure in order to subvert it. They have rejected the normative function of the fairy tale and transformed it, employing the form as a tool for critiquing the status quo. This reshaping of the fairy tale is just one of the ways that writers employ fairy tale structure. I argue that fairy tale structures are used for three broad purposes by modern writers. Firstly, fairy tales are used normatively, as a means of providing a structure that preserves traditional values, roles and politics (supporting the status quo). Secondly, fairy tales are used to provide a structure that subverts and challenges ideas and assumptions around traditional values/roles/narratives and politics (subverting the status quo). This purpose conforms with the idea that one function of the fairy tale is to act normatively to conserve traditional beliefs and values, for example, Zipes, when analysing oral tales (a major influence on both folk and literary fairy tales), writes:

“Oral tales have served to stabilise, conserve, or challenge the common beliefs, laws, values and norms of a group” (Oxford Companion xix). And, thirdly, fairy tales are used as a structural formula, framework or technical tool to enhance characterisation, mood, atmosphere and meaning. In this third mode, fairy tale structure functions as a short cut, allowing readers to bring their expectations of the fairy tale to the contemporary text. The writer who employs the structure of the fairy tale is able to draw on a suite of motifs, cultural symbols and themes that are already known by readers. The first two categories are naturally mutually exclusive—however, the third can both exist independently or overlap with the previous two categories. It is not surprising, therefore, that many writers who adopt the fairy tale as a framework for their works use the fairy tale structure for one or more of these purposes. This exegesis will examine how writers who have been inspired by “The Snow Queen” have incorporated and transformed its motifs, structures, themes and symbolism, to create new works that either support or subvert the status quo.

Supporting the status quo

Traditionally, fairy tales have a didactic function and convey contemporary moral values of a culture. Modern writers may make use of a fairy tale structure as a “short cut” to conveying a moral message in a fictional narrative. Thus, the fairy tale framework is frequently employed by writers in order to preserve cultural norms and to frame expectations around gender, morality, politics and social class. For example the genre of romantic fiction often employs the fairy tale framework to preserve traditional roles. Rowe sees romantic fiction as the “degenerate offspring”

of fairy tales and posits that it serves to transmit romantic conventions through the medium of popular literature. She suggests that such tales glorify passivity, dependency and self-sacrifice as a heroine's cardinal virtues and that that these types of stories, heavily based on fairy tale norms, suggest that society's survival depends upon a woman's acceptance of roles that relegate her to motherhood and domesticity (209–210).

This conservative approach is exemplified in the traditional romance novel that portrays a heroine who is unable to take assertive or independent action. The degree to which heroines in modern romances are passive and non-assertive varies and it is important to note that many modern tales portray more active and assertive heroines than in the past. It is notable, however, that some of the most popular and successful fiction in recent times closely follows the traditional paradigm of the passive heroine, for example, the books in *The Twilight Saga*, created by Stephenie Meyer. This commercially successful series of novels closely follows the traditional romance/fairy tale paradigm. With its theme of forbidden love and its undercurrents of threat and violence, the story can be seen as an adaption of the Perrault fairy tale, "The Beauty and the Beast". The hero (Edward) is strong; he is an older man, although of youthful appearance; he has princely qualities; he is active, independent and emotionally strong. The heroine (Bella) is weak; she is very young; she is virginal, pure and innocent; she is passive, a victim and emotionally vulnerable. Her prime achievements consist of marrying the hero and bearing his child, and doing so while undergoing suffering and self-sacrifice.

In the *Twilight* series, the fairy tale paradigm is used as a framework to preserve the status quo around gender roles, and to add weight to traditional values and assumptions associated with femininity and masculinity. As this series is aimed at young adults and teens, it may also be that the structure is used to socialise the reader. Zipes claims that since the end of the eighteenth century, publishers in France, England and Germany have targeted children as consumers of fairy tales (Oxford Companion xxiii). During this time, parents, educators, religious leaders and other parties interested in the development and acculturation of children began to impose expectations upon the fairy tale narrative. The fairy tale began to be viewed as a means to socialise and enculturate children, to preserve the mores and values of the particular, usually dominant, ideology. In the case of *The Twilight Saga*, the writer may be using the fairy tale structure for this purpose, in particular, to convey to young readers the importance of values such as virginity, faith, loyalty and self-sacrifice. Thus, the fairy tale framework can be used as a normative influence. Zipes, in relation to modern American fairy tales such as *The Wizard of Oz* and Disney's retelling of traditional fairy tales, comments that the "glitter and happy ending" of modern retellings of fairy tales can be used to promote a critical acceptance of and consent to the ideological, economic and social status quo (Oxford Companion 344).

Other writers, such as Joseph Campbell, the American mythologist, have posited that myths also fulfill the function of supporting traditional values. In *The Power of Myth*, Campbell posited four purposes of myth, one of which he termed "the sociological function" (31). This function aims to validate and support the existing

social order. He wrote that ancient societies had to conform to an existing social order if they were to survive. This is because they evolved under "pressure" from necessities much more intense than the ones encountered in our modern world. Mythology confirmed that order and enforced it by reflecting it into the stories themselves (31).

Subverting the status quo

Writers who adopt a fairy tale structure to challenge the status quo aim to subvert and challenge traditional norms and expectations. These norms and expectations may range from ideas around sexual or class politics through to expectations around literary structure and narrative. Joyce Carol Oates claims that modern feminist fairy tales work to subvert original models and to show from women's points of view how the romance of fairy tales is illusionary by presenting revised versions. For example, Elizabeth Marshall analyses how Block in her tale, "Wolf", draws on and reworks traditional Western fairy tale variants to reintroduce repressed material about sexual violence within the family (217). Marshall discusses how traditional fairy tale narratives, for example, the Grimm brothers' "Little Red Riding Hood", present girls as passive victims whose lack of adherence to convention and disobedience makes them culpable for abuse and punishment. She comments that: "This use of the fairy tale framework invites the reader to consider how cultural scripts teach us to read girlhood and sexual violence in ways that displace a critique of men as wolves in favour of a focus on girls as victims" (232). Angela Carter, too, adopts and adapts the structure, content and form of the fairy tale to examine and subvert assumptions around femininity and sexuality. Her collection of short stories, *The Bloody Chamber*, written in 1979 during the height

of the feminist movement, is based on a reimagining of fairy tales such as “Bluebeard”, “Little Red Riding Hood” and “Sleeping Beauty”. Steve Roberts argues that Angela Carter, by choosing the form of the traditional tale, is able to expose assumptions around social myths and narratives, for example, the “gentle” nature of women; the purity and innocence of virginity; and the attractions of the “alpha male” (9).

A structural or technical tool to enhance characterisation, mood and meaning and to question and challenge reality

The third way that fairy tale structure is employed in modern narratives is as a tool or device to add layers of meaning, mood or nuance. In the context of this exegesis, the term “structure” is employed to correspond to the idea of “form”, that is, to refer to what John Carlos Rowe describes as the essential properties of the artwork and the essence of the aesthetic experience (qtd. in Lentricchia and McLaughlin 32) rather than to correspond strictly to the structuralist usage of the term.

Conclusion

So, while fairy tales have attracted strong interest from theorists over the last fifty years, very few critics have attempted to define why writers turn to them for inspiration. Early interest in fairy tales focussed on the collection, ordering and cataloguing of them. Later interest became more sophisticated, with critics examining the psychological, political and sociological characteristics of fairy tales. In the last few decades, the main focus has been on the gender implications of the tales, their effect on girls and women, and their role in both reflecting and shaping gender roles.

In recent years, many writers, mostly women, have rewritten fairy tales, reimagining the roles of women within the fairy tale structure. The fact that feminists have chosen to reinvent the classic fairy tale to examine gender roles is well established and has been explored in depth by many of the critics mentioned in this chapter. Their reasons have ranged from correcting social injustice, freeing children from stereotyped gender roles to expressing their anger at the patriarchy. It has, however, become difficult to see that women writers may use the fairy tale structure, or reinvent a fairy tale, for reasons other than exploring gender inequality. The other reasons that contemporary writers might use a fairy tale structure have not been well explored.

Chapter 2: The Snow Queen in fiction.

“The Snow Queen” was originally published in 1845. Unlike many fairy tales, for example, those compiled by the Grimm brothers, Andersen’s stories were not obviously based on older folkloric tales. Although some of Andersen’s motifs and themes show the influence of traditional stories and mythology, his tales are not directly based on stories in the oral tradition. Rather, Andersen invented his stories and was the first writer to elevate the fairy tale to literary art, creating the “literary fairy tale” (Wullschlager 1). Andersen’s stories have endured and gained canonical stature, with tales such as “The Snow Queen”, “The Little Mermaid”, “The Emperor’s New Clothes”, “The Ugly Duckling”, “Thumbelina” and many others becoming firmly entrenched in Western story-telling tradition. “The Snow Queen” is one of Andersen’s longest fairy stories and its construction is somewhat different to most fairy tales as it has seven chapters or parts. For readers who are not familiar with the tale, a synopsis is in order.

This first chapter of “The Snow Queen” introduces an evil magician (sometimes translated as a “hobgoblin”) who is carrying a magical mirror to heaven. The mirror distorts beauty and magnifies flaws, and the implication is that the magician wishes to observe the effect of the mirror on heaven and the angels. The magician drops the mirror and it breaks, sending fragments of glass across the world.

The chief protagonists in the story are two friends, a young boy and girl, named Kay and Gerda. Slivers of glass from the broken mirror enter Kay’s heart and one of his eyes. As a result, he loses his ability to appreciate beauty and to feel

compassion. Kay is abducted by the Snow Queen, a mysterious white-clad woman, who enters his village in winter, driving a sleigh. Gerda leaves her village with the intention to rescue Kay from the ice palace. She stays some time in a magical garden where a witch enchants her, making her forget her quest. On her journey, Gerda meets a crow who tells her that he has seen Kay at the palace of a princess. She travels to the palace and meets the Prince who is very similar in appearance to Kay. Gerda tells the Prince and Princess her story and they provide her with new clothes and a coach.

Subsequently, Gerda is captured by a group of robbers and is made the pet of the Little Robber-maiden who threatens her with a knife, robs her of her clothes and makes her sleep in bed with her. The Little Robber-maiden's pet doves tell Gerda that they saw Kay being carried away by the Snow Queen in the direction of Lapland. The Little Robber-maiden's pet reindeer tells her that he will take her to Lapland. Gerda is released and travels to Lapland and Finland where she is given advice by two wise women. She then continues on her way to the Snow Queen's abode.

The Snow Queen has taken Kay to live in her ice palace. She tells him that only way he can escape is if he forms the word "Eternity" from shards of ice. Gerda, following the advice of the wise women in the previous chapter, finds the ice palace. She overcomes the defenses that the Snow Queen has put in place and finds Kay. She embraces him and her tears wash the mirror fragments from his heart and eye. The shards of ice spontaneously form the word "eternity" and the

Snow Queen's thrall is broken. Kay leaves the ice palace with Gerda and the story ends with the two children, now adults, living in an idyllic world filled with sunshine and roses.

Many writers have based their works either explicitly or implicitly on Andersen's story. Some examples include Bill Willingham's comic book series *Fables* and; Kelly Link's short story *Travels with the Snow Queen*. Eileen Kernaghan wrote a fantasy novel based on this story, also called *The Snow Queen*, as did Joan Vinge, the fantasy writer; Cameron Dokey wrote a novel called *Winter's Child: A retelling of "The Snow Queen"*; Alice Hoffman wrote, *The Ice Queen*, a story about a librarian emotionally frozen following the death of her mother; and C.S. Lewis's book *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is clearly inspired by Andersen's "The Snow Queen". It is beyond the scope of this exegesis to explore all these works, however, it is interesting to note that these stories cover a wide breadth of genres, audiences and styles. "The Snow Queen" has been flexibly adopted by writers in the fantasy genre, for instance, Vinge, mainstream writers such as Dokey, and writers who aim their stories at children (Lewis) and at adults. I will focus on examples by three writers who encompass a diverse range of styles and genres.

I have not only selected stories that belong in the more "highbrow" literary tradition, but also those stories that are told to young people and that are part of popular culture. My rationale is that fairy tales themselves were traditionally aimed at mass audiences and young people so it seems important to examine texts that are targeted at these audiences. For these reasons, I have chosen to analyse works by

Francesca Lia Block, Mercedes Lackey, and A.S. Byatt. Block, who is heavily influenced by magical realism, writes for young adults. Mercedes Lackey writes in the fantasy genre, and Byatt is a literary writer. Their works also exemplify the three purposes for employing fairy tales structures that were outlined in the previous chapter. Block and Byatt use the fairy tale structure to both subvert and to structurally enhance their texts. Lackey employs the fairy tale structure to support the status quo and to structurally enhance.

Block's short story, "Ice", aimed at a young adult readership, is the love story of two young people, both of whom are artists. He, "K.", is a song writer and she is a painter. The protagonist is afraid that the perfection of their love cannot last and her fears are realised when in winter, her lover becomes infatuated with the "Ice Queen", Block's equivalent of Andersen's Snow Queen character. The protagonist searches for K. and finds him in the grip of the Snow Queen where he has become empty, hollow and cold. Her tears fall on his face, melting his frozen heart, and he chooses her over the cold perfection of the Snow Queen.

Lackey's fantasy novel, *The Wizard of London*, is part of the Elemental Masters series. The novel is set in Victorian England and the narrative centres on the Harton School for Boys and Girls, run by Isabelle and Frederick Harton. This is a school for students who are clairvoyant, telepathic or have the ability to communicate with the dead. The story focuses on Lord Alderscroft who becomes cold and cruel after he is enchanted by the icy Lady Cordelia (Lackey's Snow Queen figure) who hopes to use him for political gain.

A.S.Byatt's short story, "Cold", is found in her collection of stories based on fairy tales, *Elementals: Stories of Fire and Ice*. Princess Fiammarosa, Byatt's equivalent to Andersen's Snow Queen character, discovers that she has a strong affinity for coldness. She is given her own icy section of the palace to live in and produces beautiful tapestries made of ice-blue threads. She is married to a desert prince and their lovemaking nearly destroys her, melting away a layer of protective ice that encompasses her skin. Her prince takes her to live in a castle of glass where she regains the protective shield of ice that covers her skin and also regains her lost creativity.

These diverse stories have many commonalities, but the commonality most relevant to this exegesis is that they are all based on "The Snow Queen". This chapter will analyse how these writers use "The Snow Queen" in their narratives with an emphasis on three themes. Firstly, I show how some have used the fairy tale as a method of subversion, particularly in relation to gender. Secondly, I explore how some have used the fairy tale as a way of supporting the status quo, again, with a focus on gender. Thirdly, I consider how these writers have used the fairy tale elements as a form of structural enhancement. This chapter is broken into sections that isolate essential narrative elements, themes and motifs that are found in "The Snow Queen". These are the "structural elements" within which the purposes of "subversion" and "support" are embedded. For the purpose of discussion, I have identified four elements that have inspired modern writers to

base their stories on "The Snow Queen". The elements are structure, gender, themes and symbols.

Inspired by structure

Fairy tales have a dense and rich cultural collateral. Most modern readers will be familiar with the cultural work of the fairy tale and find resonance with fairy tales that are particular to their own experience. Writers may therefore employ fairy tale structures as a "short cut" to add depth or layers of meaning to their work. These structures or patterns are frequently consistent and predictable. Many can be identified as structures that have been analysed and categorised by such theorists as Vladimir Propp, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and Joseph Campbell. These theorists have argued that narratives have rigid staged structures that inform meaning. For example, Joseph Campbell, the American mythologist who is best known for his work on myth and comparative religion, coined the term "monomyth" to describe a fundamental, fixed pattern found in myths from a diverse range of cultures and societies. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, published in 1949, Campbell posited that myths have a predictable structure that can be broken down into a series of stages, for example, "The call to adventure", "Meeting with the Goddess" and "Return". Many of Campbell's stages are similar to the fixed elements that Vladimir Propp outlined in his *Morphology of the Folktale*, a work published in 1928 but that only became widely read when translated into English in 1958. As Propp's work focussed exclusively on fairy tales, rather than on myth, I have chosen to use his work as a basis for examining fairy tale structure.

Propp proposed that most fairy tale plots follow a basic pattern. The pattern features a hero or heroine who is initially faced with a taboo or prohibition that he or she breaks. The protagonist is then forced to perform a task that is related to the breaking of the taboo or prohibition. The task becomes essential to the protagonist's destiny, and while fulfilling that destiny, the protagonist meets with a range of stereotyped characters or creatures that provide magical assistance. The protagonist will undergo various tests and will ultimately triumph and achieve a goal. This pattern is easily recognisable in the work of many contemporary writers whose work is influenced by fairy tales, for example, the fantasy writers, Terri Windling, Midori Snyder and Mercedes Lackey.

Propp applied the principles of Russian formalism to the analysis of folk tales. His approach, structuralism, stressed the functional role of literary devices. He identified a number of elements to the folk tale that he considered to be fixed and unchangeable, and developed a nomenclature and classification system for describing plot, character and themes. His approach focuses purely on the fairy tale form. Thus, despite the fact that structuralism is no longer in vogue as a way of looking at texts, Propp's approach provides a useful tool for exploring the ways that contemporary writers use the fairy tale structure in their own works. Broadly speaking, Propp posited that folk tales are based on a departure-test-return pattern. Within this structure he outlined thirty-one functions or sub-stages. Most of these functions can be found in "The Snow Queen" and the order in which they occur conforms approximately to Propp's framework. Propp's framework begins when one of the members of a family absents him or herself from home (26). In the

case of "The Snow Queen", this occurs when Kay is injured by the mirror shards and becomes emotionally removed from his family. This stage is found in, for instance Perrault's "Little Red Riding Hood" where Little Red Riding Hood leaves her home and sets off through the woods to visit her grandmother and in "Puss in Boots" where the cat dons a pair of boots and sets forth on a series of adventures. The second stage involves an interdiction. This could be seen in "The Snow Queen" as occurring when the grandmother tells a story to Kay and Gerda about the Snow Queen and warns of her icy breath. Kay states that if the Snow Queen were to come into his house, he would vanquish her by placing her on the warm stove (120). In Grimm's "Cinderella" this warning is found when Cinderella is cautioned that she must be home by midnight and in "Hansel and Gretel" where the witch whispers to the children a warning that she is aware that children are nibbling at her house.

The third stage involves a violation of the interdiction. This is when the villain enters the tale. Propp writes that "his role is to disturb the peace of a happy family, to cause some form of misfortune, damage or harm" (27). This occurs in Andersen's tale when Kay fastens his sledge to the Snow Queen's sleigh and is taken away by her. This stage is commonly found in many other fairy tales, for instance, in "Hansel and Gretel", the children ignore the witch's warning and claim that it is the wind that is nibbling at the house. In "Cinderella", the protagonist stays out beyond midnight and in "Bluebeard", the protagonist enters the forbidden room.

In stage four, the villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance. This takes place when the Snow Queen appears at Kay's window and beckons to him. In Grimm's "Hansel and Gretel", the witch emerges from her house to engage with the children and in Perrault's "Little Red Riding Hood", the wolf speaks to Little Red Riding Hood in the woods. In stage five, the villain receives information about the victim, for instance, in Perrault's "Blue Beard", the villain hears that amongst his neighbours there was a lady who had two beautiful daughters. This stage is absent from "The Snow Queen" and, indeed, absent from a large number of fairy tales, for instance, it is not apparent in most versions of "Cinderella" and "Little Red Riding Hood".

However, stages six and seven, where firstly, the villain attempts to deceive the victim in order to take possession of him or his belongings and secondly where the victim submits to deception and thereby unwittingly helps the enemy, can be found in the scene where Kay fastens his sleigh to the Snow Queen's sledge and finds he cannot release it. These stages are also simple to identify in a number of other fairy tales, for instance, in "Little Red Riding Hood", where the wolf deceives the victim that he is her grandmother and in "Blue Beard" where the villain convinces his victim that his evil reputation is undeserved and she agrees to marry him. In stage eight the villain causes harm or injury to a member of the family. In "The Snow Queen", Kay is confined to the ice palace and frozen so that he becomes black and blue with cold (147). This stage is found in numerous tales, for instance, Perrault's "Little Red Riding Hood" where the wolf devours the grandmother and in "Sleeping Beauty" where the princess is pricked by the needle, in Grimm's "Cinderella" where she is treated poorly by her stepmother and in "Snow White"

where she is poisoned by the apple. According to Propp, this is an exceptionally important stage. The previous seven functions can be seen as the preparatory part of the tale that lead to this point (31).

In stage nine, the hero enters the tale. He or she may receive a call for help, or be sent to render assistance. Propp proposes that in stage ten, the hero will state his or her intention in the form of agreeing to or deciding upon a counteraction. Thus, Gerda states: "I will put on my new red shoes...those which Kay has never seen, and then I will go down to the river and ask after him" (125). Again, this stage is found in many fairy tales, in Perrault's "Little Red Riding Hood", the huntsman declares his intention to kill the wolf, stating that he has long sought out the wolf, in "Sleeping Beauty", the Prince is galvanised to seek out the Princess who is rumoured to be sleeping in a castle hidden in the woods, and in "Cinderella", the Prince states his intention to seek out the woman whose foot would fit the slipper. In stage eleven, the hero will leave home to accomplish a heroic mission. If the mission involves the recovery of a kidnapped or abducted victim, then Propp defines the hero as a "seeker" (36). This stage is easily identified in "The Snow Queen" as the scene where Gerda (the seeker) decides to leave home to seek Kay.

In stage twelve, the hero undergoes a series of trials, including tests, interrogations and attacks. In "The Snow Queen", Gerda undergoes a number of tests, including the events that take place in the enchanted flower garden and the struggle with the

Little Robber-maiden. Other tales that include this stage are Perrault's "Puss in Boots", where the cat undergoes a series of tests and "Little Tom Thumb" where Tom must find his way back from the woods. In stage thirteen, the hero reacts to the actions of the character that will ultimately provide the hero with the magical agent or helper (the donor). In "The Snow Queen", this occurs when Gerda struggles to overcome the memory loss that occurs in the flower garden, and when she struggles with the Little Robber-maiden. In stage fourteen, the hero acquires the use of a magical agent or helper. In "The Snow Queen", Gerda acquires a number of such helpers, including the Raven and the reindeer. This stage can also be found in "Cinderella" where the Fairy Godmother assists Cinderella, or in the tale of "Aladdin" where the Genie appears and assists the hero.

In stage fifteen, the hero is transferred, delivered or led to the whereabouts of an object of search. According to Propp, the object of the search is located in "another" or a "different" kingdom (50). This "kingdom" is the realm of the Snow Queen, Lapland or Finmark. Gerda is informed by a magical helper, a wood pigeon, that she must travel to this kingdom to find Kay (141). In many tales, this kingdom is found hidden within a wood or forest, for instance, in "Sleeping Beauty", "Snow White" and "Tom Thumb". In stage sixteen, the hero and villain engage in direct conflict. Gerda never directly interacts with the Snow Queen, however, the equivalent event in Andersen's tale takes place when Gerda fights with a "regiment of snowflakes", clearly agents of the Snow Queen, that Gerda defeats by reciting the Lord's Prayer (146). This stage is found in "Little Red Riding Hood" when the hunter kills the wolf, in Grimm's "Cinderella" where the step sisters are punished for

their cruelty and in Perrault's "Puss in Boots" where the cat tricks the ogre into turning into a mouse and eats him. In stage seventeen, the hero is branded, wounded or marked. This is not a stage that is found in "The Snow Queen", however, the story does describe the terrible icy cold to which Gerda is subjected on her journey after she is stripped of her warm clothing. This suffering could perhaps be considered a "wounding" or a "branding". Similarly, this stage is difficult to find in many fairy tales. It is not found in "Little Red Riding Hood", "Puss in Boots" or "Hansel and Gretel". It is present in Andersen's "The Little Mermaid" where the Little Mermaid is rendered dumb and subject to pain when walking and perhaps in "Cinderella" where the protagonist is marked with cinders and ash. In stage nineteen, the initial misfortune (Kay's abduction) is resolved. In this case, Gerda's tears melt the shards of mirror that have wounded Kay, saving him from the Snow Queen. Propp comments that it is at this stage that the narrative reaches its peak (53), and certainly this is the case in "The Snow Queen". In "Cinderella", the protagonist is given beautiful clothes and a carriage and is able to attend the ball. In "Sleeping Beauty", the Prince kisses the Princess and she awakens. In stage twenty, the hero returns. In "The Snow Queen" the two children leave the palace and retrace their steps to their village. It is at this point, that Andersen's tale is complete, that is, it does not follow the additional functions that Propp lists. In fact, many fairy tales are completed at this stage, for instance, Cinderella marries the Prince, Hansel and Gretel escape the witch and return home, Snow White marries the Prince and they return to his kingdom and so on. These additional functions that occur after this point include a wide range of events, some of which are referenced in "The Snow Queen", however not in Propp's proposed order. This

is essentially because the tale of “The Snow Queen” has two narratives running concurrently; the story of Gerda and the story of Kay.

Functions that are included in “The Snow Queen”, but not in the sequence that Propp proposes, are as follows. Stage 21, the hero is pursued, takes place when Gerda is chased by the robbers who live in the forest (139). Stage 22, the rescue of the hero from pursuit, occurs when Little Robber-maiden prevents Gerda being stabbed (139). Stage 23 posits that the hero arrives home on in another country unrecognised. This stage doesn’t occur in “The Snow Queen”. However, stage 24, where a false hero presents unfounded claims, could arguably be seen as taking place in chapter four of “The Snow Queen”, where Gerda believes Kay has married a princess. She recognised him by his “creaky boots”.

Stage 25, where a difficult task is proposed to the hero, is found in “The Snow Queen” where Kay must solve the ice shard puzzle (he must form the word “eternity” from the pieces of ice found in the Lake of Reason). It could equally be argued that this was also a task for Gerda, one that she resolved magically when her tears fell on Kay (resolution of the problem is stage 26). Propp outlines a number of types of task that are found within this function. These include ordeal by food and drink, ordeals by fire, riddle guessing and similar ordeals, ordeal of choice, hide and seek, kissing the princess, tests of strength, tests of endurance, tests of supply and manufacture et cetera. His third type of ordeal, “riddle guessing and similar” applies to the ice puzzle (60).

In stage 27, the hero is recognised. This stage is not found in *The Snow Queen*. In stage 28, the false hero is exposed. This takes place when the prince awakens in chapter four, turns his head and Gerda realises that he is not Kay (138). In stage 29, the hero is given a new appearance. This takes place in "The Snow Queen" when the ice melts from Kay's heart and eye. Andersen writes: "And Gerda kissed his cheeks, whereupon they became fresh and glowing as ever; she kissed his eyes, and they sparkled like her own; she kissed his hands and feet, and he was once more healthy and merry" (149). He is no longer blue and black with cold as described earlier (147).

In stage 30, the villain is punished. This is a stage that is conspicuously absent in "The Snow Queen". The Snow Queen herself does not undergo any punishment for her actions and is not subject to retribution. In fact, she is not present at the end of the story and the reader does not learn what happens to her after she leaves Kay in the palace and travels to the "warm countries" to "flit through the air and look into the black cauldrons" (148).

Finally, in stage 31, the hero is married and ascends the throne. The way this stage or function is expressed within Andersen's tale is very interesting as the resolution is recast from a religious or spiritual perspective. The hero does not marry (a step towards adulthood), but rather remains frozen in the innocent state of childhood, "There they sat, those two happy ones, grown up and yet children—

children in heart, while all around them glowed bright summer..." (151). Nor does the hero ascend a throne and win a kingdom, rather, the hero enters the figurative "kingdom of heaven" for at the end of the chapter, the grandmother reads from the bible: "Unless ye become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (150). There are many fairy tales where the kingdom is very literal, for instance, "Sleeping Beauty", "Snow White", "Cinderella", "Puss in Boots" and "Little Tom Thumb", but also many where, similarly to "The Snow Queen", the kingdom is either not literal or not present at all, for instance, "Little Red Riding Hood", "The Little Mermaid" and "Hansel and Gretel".

I would argue that the reason that these functions do not occur in Andersen's tale in the same order as Propp proposes is that Andersen's tale in fact consists of two narrative threads, that of Kay's story and that of Gerda's story. These narrative threads overlap, giving the impression that the order is disrupted when in fact it is mostly intact.

The three stories under discussion also broadly follow the structure identified in "The Snow Queen". In this section, I shall analyse Block's story, "Ice", in relation to Propp's functions. I have chosen "Ice" as a starting point because it is closely based on Andersen's story in regard to content. It also resembles Andersen's tale in structure, but is less linear and concrete in its conception. While most of the functions found in Andersen's story can be found in Block's story, they are ordered differently, often expressed in an abstract fashion, and are fluid in terms of

temporality. Much of the narrative occurs in flashbacks or takes place in the hero's memory. Nonetheless, most functions can be isolated. For example, stage one (the departure of a family member) is described, as in "The Snow Queen", as an emotional/psychological departure rather than a physical one: "He began to have trouble writing songs. He looked blurry to me after he sang. He was fading" (215).

Stage two, the interdiction is found when the hero tries to force K. to confess his secret: "Maybe I was just being selfish, wanting to know his secret, whatever it was, the one thing I couldn't have" (212). Stage three, the violation of the interdiction, where the villain makes his or her first appearance, occurs when Block writes: "that was when she came, my beautiful fear...Something poisonous and forbidden" (216).

Stage five (the villain receives information about the victim), as in "The Snow Queen", is omitted. Stages six and seven are found in "Ice" when firstly, K. is deceived by the villain: "I'll make you a god, she said.", and secondly when K. is complicit in allowing himself to be stolen away by the villain (221). As in Andersen's tale, K.'s contact with the villain causes him to forget his loved ones, for example, he does not recognise the rose tattoo on the heroine's wrist (217). Stage eight (the villain causes harm, for example, abducts a victim) is expressed by Block in a single simple but powerful, sentence: "Then he (K.) disappeared" (221).

In stages nine, ten, eleven and twelve (the functions that lead to the heroine leaving to find the victim and undergoing trials and tests), Block's story elides these functions, assuming some knowledge on the part of the reader of Andersen's story. Block writes: "I would have ridden on a reindeer or the back of a bird, I would have gone to the North Pole...I painted every story about stolen deadened boys, nearly devoured by evil queens, revived by loving girls...I painted myself on the back of a reindeer" (218–19). Thus, she uses the reader's knowledge of the functions of Andersen's tale to enhance her own tale, and to progress the narrative rapidly. By doing this, she shifts Gerda's journey to a metaphorical level. It is no longer an actual journey, involving physical displacement and accompanied by a series of picaresque adventures. Rather, it becomes a psychological, abstract journey towards the reclamation of K.'s humanity.

Functions thirteen and fourteen entail the hero interacting with a "donor" and acquiring a magical agent. Block clearly draws these functions from "The Snow Queen". Block's protagonist asks the birds and flowers where K. can be found. "I walked down by the lake where we used to go. Some roses were struggling up. I asked them. They said they'd been under the ground and he wasn't there. They said I should go to see her" (223). This narrative is directly based on the enchanted garden chapter of Andersen's tale. In stage fifteen, the hero is transferred, delivered or led to the location to the whereabouts of an object of search. In Block's tale, the protagonist seeks out K. in the home of the villain: "I walked through the iron gates, up the icy path among the snow-covered trees, over the threshold of the white palace" (224).

In stage sixteen, the hero and the villain directly engage in combat. This is a stage that is obliquely referenced in "The Snow Queen", but is directly addressed in Block's story where the protagonist is confronted by the villain: "She said I really shouldn't come barging in like that, didn't I know he didn't want me anymore?" (226). The confrontation, however, is not a physical one as there is no violence or combat. However, the villain does remove her clothes and stand naked before the victim. The protagonist must therefore struggle to gain the attention of the victim, who is transfixed by the villain's physical beauty: "I thought I had really gone mad this time, even trying to get him to look at me" (227).

Interestingly, some of the functions that are not strongly represented in Andersen's tale are found in "Ice", for example, at stage seventeen, where the hero is branded or marked occurs in Block's story where the heroine describes a tattoo of a rose on her wrist that she obtained to cover some scars caused by self harm (217). At stages eighteen and nineteen, the villain is defeated. This occurs in Block's story where the victim turns away from the villain and looks at the hero (229). The final stage in both Andersen's tale and in Block's story occurs at function twenty, where the hero returns. This is expressed as: "Once he and I were children, before this happened" (229). This resolution directly relates to Andersen's own ending.

In this section, I have used Propp's functions to explicate the structure of "The Snow Queen" and the structure of "Ice". This has enabled me, firstly, to

demonstrate that Block has clearly adopted the structure of “The Snow Queen” in her short story, and, secondly, to show that this has enabled Block to employ the reader’s knowledge of Andersen’s tale to expedite the reader’s understanding of her tale. Block’s story is short, and she seeks to convey a multitude of meanings with few words. By employing a known structure, she is able focus on her message rather than on plot. Block doesn’t attempt to subvert Andersen’s story, but uses the framework in good faith to tell the same story, about a young girl who uses her empathy, kindness and love to save a young man that she cares about. I argue that she doesn’t use the structure to make a statement about gender inequality or to make any other political statement. Rather, her purpose is to use the structure of the fairy tale, firstly as a short cut (structurally) and secondly, as will be explained in more detail later in the exegesis, as a way of exploring the pressures and concerns of young people in society today, for instance, issues around pornography, apathy, despair and drug use.

Inspired by gender

Fairy tales often depict passive female characters who are victimised and abused but ultimately saved by active and dynamic male characters. This is a theme found in stories such as “Cinderella” (Perrault), “Snow White and the Seven Dwarves” (Brothers Grimm), “Beauty and the Beast” (Perrault) and “The Sleeping Beauty” (Perrault). The female characters in these stories tend to display stereotyped feminine behaviour such as passivity, reliance on rescue and willing bondage to father and family. Furthermore, female characters tend to be found only in domestic settings, such as in the nursery or kitchen (Rowe 209). Since the 1970s,

many writers have re-imagined fairy tales through a feminist lens, employing them to subvert the status quo; they rewrite fairy tales to expose and overturn assumptions and conventions around societal norms and literary conventions. According to Zipes, these writers have sought to address issues such as voice and voicelessness, the commodification of women, gender relations, the education of women and other inequalities found in patriarchal societies (Oxford Companion 156). For example, Jeanette Winterson in *Sexing the Cherry* examines gender roles in fairy tales and subverts them (the twelve dancing princesses). She presents a “monster”, an “ogre” as a woman and rewrites the tale of “The Twelve Dancing Princesses”, giving them lives and meaning beyond “happily ever after”.

At a superficial level, “The Snow Queen”, portrays gender roles differently to most traditional fairy tales. Notably, the protagonist, the rescuer, in Andersen’s tale is female and the victim is male and must be saved. Of the major characters, eight are very strong female characters and only one is a male. The story features a preponderance of female characters in a variety of active roles and in a number of non-domestic settings, for example, forests, caves and ice savannahs. The female characters are shown to be intelligent, powerful, active and resourceful. There is a princess who is described as “most uncommonly clever.” The Raven describes her thus: “All the newspapers in the world has she read, and forgotten them again, so clever is she” (134). There is the wise-woman of Finmark to whom the reindeer says:

You are so powerful... that I know thou canst twist all the
winds into a rope, of which if the pilot loosen one knot, he will

have a favourable wind; if he loosen the second, it will blow sharp; and if he loosens a third, so tremendous a storm will arise that the trees of the forest will be uprooted and the ship wrecked. (144)

Other strong female characters in “The Snow Queen” include the wise old grandmother, the old lady who is an enchantress in the flower garden, the Lapland woman, the feisty Little Robber-maiden, the Snow Queen and, of course, Gerda, herself. Unlike the female characters in most fairy tales, these female characters are not defined in relation to males. They are not obviously “sisters”, “wives”, “sweethearts”, or “mothers” of male characters. All the women in the story are single except for the Raven couple and the briefly mentioned Prince and Princess. Pat Rigg echoes this view of “The Snow Queen” as a text that subverts the usual fairy tale gender stereotypes in her paper, *Those spunky girls: an annotated bibliography*, writing of Gerda:

Spunky gals are smart, and they take the initiative: They don't wait for someone else to solve the problem, to rescue them, or to wake them from defenseless passivity with a kiss... (154)

This non-traditional view of femininity portrayed in “The Snow Queen” may be a reason why some contemporary writers have adopted “The Snow Queen” as a framework for modern narratives. However, it would be simplistic to interpret “The Snow Queen” as a feminist text. While “The Snow Queen” does feature a female in the role of rescuer, and while this is obviously a different approach from the common theme of a male character setting out to rescue a female, it should be noted that the female rescuer in “The Snow Queen” does not effect her rescue in a “masculine” way, for instance, with a sword or with any other typically masculine

displays of force and strength. She does not slay any dragons or kill any ogres, rather, she employs stereotypically feminine strengths to rescue Kay. She elicits the assistance of a number of characters by winning them over with her virtue, purity and goodness. For example, as Gerda approaches the ice palace, she is attacked by a regiment of snowflakes that resemble porcupines and other frightening creatures. She slays these adversaries by reciting the Lord's Prayer, that is, by demonstrating her piety and her pure, strong faith. As she recites the Lord's Prayer her breath solidifies and takes the shape of a phalanx of angels who slay the snowflake army on her behalf. She ultimately rescues Kay with her tears, with her human compassion and feminine sensibility. The story follows the pattern whereby man is redeemed by woman. Gerda's purity and innocence saves Kay. According to Jackie Wullschlager: "The tale is a variation of 'woman's redemption of man', which is why Gerda cannot grow up, her innocence must save Kay" (254).

In *The Snow Queen*, Kay is released from his thrall by Gerda's tears. While this scenario appears to be an obviously "feminine" one, that is, men, especially heroes, do not cry in fairy tales, there may be another perspective. I argue that the "tears" in this story are a similar device to the "kiss" found in stories like "Sleeping Beauty" and "Snow White". Kisses and tears can both be seen as "tender" and "gentle" ways of rescuing a victim, whether that victim is a girl in glass coffin or a boy encased in an ice palace. From this perspective, "The Snow Queen" functions well as a framework for a feminist tale.

Block, as mentioned earlier, draws heavily on the structure of “The Snow Queen”. In relation to gender, she adheres closely to Andersen’s story, recreating the Andersen characters with great fidelity. Like Andersen, she focuses her story on the “Gerda” character. Her story is written in first person and purely from the point of view of that character (who remains unnamed). Block’s Gerda character is clearly very similar to Andersen’s, although the religious tendencies, for instance, the extreme piety and purity, are downplayed. Her nurturing, caring qualities, however, are if anything exaggerated in comparison to Andersen’s Gerda. There is a scene where she explains that she could feel everything that “Kay” felt: “...how there was something from his childhood that he was trying to forget by singing but how it never quite left him—though I couldn’t quite feel what it was. I have felt people before; my mom used to call me an empath” (205). In a sense, Block has hyper-feminised the Gerda character, emphasising the character’s emotionality and sensitivity. It is possible that she has done this because she is writing for a young adult audience and wishes to show understanding of the heightened emotions and sensibilities of that age group.

Lackey portrays the Gerda character quite differently, choosing to depict her using three characters: Isabelle, Nan and Sarah, who like Gerda in “The Snow Queen” use their sweetness, innocence and spirituality to achieve their goals. These three characters play a key role in defeating Lady Cordelia and restoring Lord David Aldercroft’s humanity. These characters portray stereotypically feminine characteristics; two of them are extremely ladylike and the third is shown to be vulgar and lacking in the finer graces (rather like Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady*),

but as the story progresses, she learns to become more ladylike and graceful. In this respect, Lackey appears to be using fairy tale structure to that reinforces feminine stereotypes, that is, to support the status quo around gender roles. The way that she positions female characters implies that women should remain behind the scenes and use their feminine qualities (piety, kindness, emotionality) to achieve their goals rather than trying to compete on equal ground with men.

One of the most intriguing characters in Andersen's tale is the Snow Queen herself. She can be seen as displaying traditional male values; she is independent, intelligent, cold, scientific and logical. She appears to be unencumbered by family; she owns her own residence; she is independently wealthy. It is interesting, too, that unlike in many fairy tales, Andersen's Snow Queen is not vanquished or punished for her evil acts. The witch in "Hansel and Gretel" is pushed into the fire, in some versions of "Little Red Riding Hood" the wolf is slain. However in "The Snow Queen", the villain goes unpunished. She is never confronted and never defeated. The story is resolved when Gerda steals Kay away after "innocence and love" break the spell. It would appear that the Snow Queen's power remains intact. It is reasonable to assume that such a character would hold a particular attraction for a feminist writer.

In Andersen's tale, the Snow Queen plays the role of an abductor or a bogeyman. When we first hear of her it is made clear that she is a dangerous and magical being. Kay's grandmother describes her as a type of queen bee (the snowflakes being compared to bees) and states:

She flies yonder where they swarm so thickly: she is the largest of them, and never remains upon the earth, but flies up again into the black cloud. Sometimes, on a winter's nights, she flies through the streets of the town, and breathes with her frosty breath upon the windows and then they are covered with strange and beautiful forms, like trees and flowers. (120)

Later, Kay goes home and peeps out the window.

Just then a few snowflakes fell outside, and one, the largest of them, remained lying on the edge of one of the flower pots. The snowflake appeared larger and larger, and at last took the form of a lady dressed in the finest white crape, her attire being composed of millions of star-like particles. She was exquisitely fair and delicate, but entirely of ice—glittering, dazzling ice; her eyes gleamed like two bright stars, but there was no rest or repose in them. She nodded at the window, and beckoned with her hand. The little boy was frightened and jumped down from the chair. (120–21)

It is clear at this point that the Snow Queen is a figure of fear, a bogeyman, and that she constitutes a threat to Kay. In *No Go the Bogyman*, Marina Warner writes:

Even the Snow Queen, in Hans Christian Andersen's famous and beautiful fairy tale, retains traces of this terror, for she abducts her child victims, like the boy Kay, to her palace in the far north where she freezes them into statues of blue ice. (27–28)

Warner sees the "Bogeyman" as being the embodiment of fear. She argues that the bogeyman is a creature that "materialises fear in some kind of living shape" (4). She also sees bogeymen and women as being imagined as "single, anomalous outsiders" (28). It is clear that the Snow Queen fits this paradigm. She lives alone;

she is very different to all others; she comes from an icy landscape; and is an intruder in a summery land filled with roses and sunshine. As the abductor of children, she embodies fear.

However, I argue that while a superficial reading of the story can lead to the assumption that the Snow Queen is a typical “witch” figure, in fact, the character of the Snow Queen is ambiguous and it is not clear that she is truly evil or malicious. After all, Kay does go willingly with the Snow Queen, and the Snow Queen does keep her bargain with him, releasing him when he forms the word “eternity”. She is not obviously cruel to him. In fact, she seems to care for him, kissing him and providing him with the illusion that he is warm. Furthermore, the Snow Queen herself is not responsible for the actual harm that occurs to Kay. It is the Magician’s evil mirror that causes Kay to become emotionally damaged. In fact, it could be argued that the Snow Queen puts in place a chain of events that result in saving Kay from the damage caused by the mirror. Ellen Brown picks up on the ambiguity of the figure of the Snow Queen:

I am supposed to denounce the Snow Queen, but I feel sorry for her. Why? She has kidnapped Kay and made him forget all that he loves, but she is also lonely and cold, a queen cloistered in her huge ice castle — a room of her own — devoid of company and love. She isn’t mean; she’s nice — and she loves Kay. She is a generous and honest woman, giving the freedom that she has promised when Kay earns it. And she is wise... Secretly, I want to be like the Snow Queen ... for she has strength, power, property, things which my culture has told me it is good to want... (5–6)

Block, in her story, "Ice", also portrays the character as an abductor or bogeyman, but she manages to capture Andersen's ambivalence about the nature of the Snow Queen. When Block's "Snow Queen" steals away "Kay", Block's description of the terror of that abduction is exquisite: "That was when she came, my beautiful fear. My fear so beautiful that I almost desired it—her. She was the porn goddess, ice sex, glistening and shiny and perfection" (216). Like Andersen's Snow Queen, she is an ambiguous figure, a force of nature that cannot be resisted. Block's Snow Queen is enigmatic and mysterious; the reader cannot even be certain that she is an actual person. She is described as a pornography star who steals K. away from the protagonist. K. is enthralled by her and, like Kay, sleeps at her feet in her icy abode. However, Block's story is abstract and metaphorical enough that the reader cannot help but wonder if Block's Snow Queen is physically present, a character in a film or a metaphor for drug addiction. For example, Block writes of K.'s obsession: "He is lying in her burning cold bed watching the video screen. This is how they touch. She's too perfect to be real" (220). In this way, Block's character is very similar to Andersen's. Both are unknowable and possibly metaphorical (Andersen's Snow Queen could be interpreted as an embodiment of winter).

Superficially, a point of departure between Block's Snow Queen and Andersen's Snow Queen may be that Block's Snow Queen is explicitly sexualised; for example, Block's character is a porn star and when the protagonist confronts her, she stands naked before her. On initial reading, this appears to be a departure from Andersen's version of the character, as Andersen's Snow Queen does not appear to be overtly sexual. However, Block's interpretation of Andersen's

character appears to be deliberate; a careful reading of Andersen's tale does reveal a strong sexual undercurrent to the Snow Queen's relationship with Kay. For example, the Snow Queen uses her kisses to persuade (seduce?) Kay to forget about Gerda and his past (124), and Kay sleeps at the Snow Queen's feet (125). Block appears to identify this underlying theme of the seductive nature of the Snow Queen and simply bring it to the fore in her version of the story.

In Mercedes Lackey's fantasy novel, *The Wizard of London*, Lady Cordelia is the equivalent of Andersen's Snow Queen. Unlike Andersen or Block's versions of the character, Lackey attempts to provide the reader with some insight into Lady Cordelia's psychology. She seeks to fill the gaps in Andersen's description of the Snow Queen. I argue, however, that she does this in a fairly simplistic fashion, choosing to portray the character as a stereotypical villain. And like a traditional villain, Lackey's Snow Queen is defeated and vanquished. Again, Lackey's representation contrasts with Andersen's Snow Queen and Block's Snow Queen, both of whom go unpunished.

Lackey portrays the Snow Queen, Lady Cordelia, as an abductor of small children, murdering them so she can enslave their ghosts to use as spies. She also plots to steal Lord Alderscroft's (the "Kay" figure in Lackey's story) body, planning to replace his consciousness with her own. Lackey's portrayal does not capture the essence of Andersen's character, but rather reduces her to a stereotype. There is no ambiguity in Lackey's Snow Queen. Lady Cordelia is shown to be driven by evil rather than mere coldness and rationality. As such, she is depicted as a traditional

fairy tale witch figure. Deliberately or perhaps inadvertently, Lackey sends the message that ambition, ruthlessness and lack of sensibility are traits that are unfeminine and perhaps even “evil” if possessed by a woman. Lady Cordelia struggles to obtain power and influence in a society that does not permit women to engage in politics. Lackey gets straight to the point, when she writes:

There was really only one group standing in the way of Cordelia’s ambitions. Men. The world was owned and ruled by men. Women were distinctly second-class citizens; cherished pets at best, or chattel at worse... (163)

Lady Cordelia’s plan is to steal a man’s body, replace his consciousness with her own and thus obtain greater influence in a patriarchal society. However, it is unlikely that Lackey is protesting gender inequality when she describes Lady Cordelia’s goals; it is difficult to feel any empathy with a character who abducts and kills children. It is clear that the reader is not expected to be sympathetic towards Lady Cordelia’s struggle with gender inequality.

Furthermore, Lackey’s Snow Queen figure is depicted as being obsessed with her looks and youth (much like the evil queen in Snow White). It is interesting that Lackey should add this stereotypically feminine character trait to her version of the Snow Queen character, as the original shows no tendency towards having any interest in her looks. It would appear that Lackey felt it necessary to ensure that Lady Cordelia had a traditional feminine failing, vanity, as well as being a ruthless killer.

Byatt, in her story, "Cold", presents a very different perspective on the character of the Snow Queen. Fiammarosa is the Snow Queen figure in "Cold" but unlike Lackey and Block, Byatt portrays Fiammarosa with great sympathy. In Byatt's story, the Kay character is absent, rather, Princess Fiammorosa seems to embody both the Snow Queen and Kay. Byatt's decision to combine these two characters does have some perhaps inadvertent consequences, rendering the Snow Queen character less independent, weaker and more passive. By incorporating elements of Kay into the character, Byatt reinterprets the Snow Queen as something of a victim. For instance, in Byatt's story, it is Princess Fiammarosa, the Snow Queen figure, who is abducted, like Kay, not unwillingly, when she goes with Prince Sasan to his desert kingdom.

Byatt's portrayal of Fiammarosa is a less confrontational depiction of Andersen's Snow Queen and far more feminine. Fiammarosa appears to be passive and is not an agent of her own fate. In this respect, she resembles Kay, who is also a passive victim. Fiammarosa, like many fairy tale heroines, must await the approaches of suitors rather than seeking her own partner. She does not question that she will marry. When she is dying from the heat in her husband's desert realm, she takes no action, for example, she does not leave her husband to live somewhere cooler. It is her husband who saves her by building her a residence that is cooled by complex machinery. She does not build such a place for herself, but passively accepts her husband's assistance. Again, this contrasts with Andersen's Snow Queen, who appears to have built her own ice palace and who has no obvious relationships with men (apart from the fleeting and distant relationship with Kay).

By creating Fiammorosa's character as a combined Kay/Snow Queen, Byatt may have weakened the feminist subtext of her narrative. Kay is a passive character, a victim who must be rescued. In Andersen's tale, he is a male character rescued by a female. As such, the rescue is unusual and has something of feminist feel to it. When Byatt, changes the gender of the character to female (Fiammorosa), she returns the narrative to the more traditional gender structure: active male character (Prince Sasan) rescues passive female character (Fiammorosa).

Fiammarosa is obviously very human and her actions, feelings and thoughts can be understood by the reader. This contrasts with Andersen's Snow Queen who is mysterious and enigmatic. Byatt portrays Fiammarosa from a warm, sympathetic viewpoint; we are privy to how Fiammarosa feels, what she desires, her goals and what she values. Byatt seems to be filling the gap that Andersen left in his tale. She explains what Andersen has left untouched in his characterisation, however, in doing so she again appears to feminise the Snow Queen, for example, Fiammarosa, despite her rationality, is certainly more of an artist than a scientist, and the story focuses on her relationships with men (her father, her tutor, her husband), and her pregnancy. We come to understand how she fits within her family and she is defined by her relationships to others. This is again in stark contrast to Andersen's Snow Queen.

In "Cold", Byatt uses the ideas of warmth and coldness to symbolise masculinity and femininity respectively. This is where Byatt's tale is firmly anchored conceptually to the character of the Snow Queen in Andersen's story. Jessica Tiffin

argues that in "Cold", cold and heat (ice and desert) are contrasted to illustrate female coolness and intellectualism and how it can be threatened by male emotional warmth and sexual love (55). Byatt aims to show that Fiammarosa embodies creativity, but also cold intellectualism and scientific rationality, for example, Byatt writes: "She studied snow-crystals and ice formations under a magnifying glass" (134). This is an image that Byatt has borrowed directly from Andersen's tale where he writes: "Now look through the magnifying glass...these [snowflakes] are far more interesting than real flowers; there is not a single blemish upon them; they would be quite perfect, if only they did not melt" (123).

Fiammarosa's prince, in contrast, embodies warmth and passion. He is a desert prince and he works with glass, forming fantastic art works in a fiery furnace. Byatt sees that the woman artist may need to foster her own creativity in an environment that suits her needs, in this case, an isolated, cold, icy environment. These are concepts with which Andersen does not directly engage in his story; his interest focuses on the "feminine" realms of emotionality and spirituality, in contrast to the "masculine" realms of rationality and science. Byatt reinterprets this, presenting creativity and science as feminine pursuits and emotionality and technology as masculine. While Byatt's approach does not align exactly with Andersen's, it is, however, clearly inspired by his work.

According to Kathleen Williams Renk, Byatt uses the structure of the fairy tale, with its matriarchal origins, to examine what conditions are necessary for a woman to create art, arguing that a woman artist must remain aloof and separate from life (614). Byatt's main protagonists, Fiammarosa and Prince Saran, are both artists

and art is shown to be the medium which enables the icy cold Fiammarosa and the fiery Prince Saran to connect with each other despite their incompatible natures. Byatt reimagines Andersen's ice palace, transforming it from a sterile environment to a place where art can be created. Andersen's ice palace symbolises science, rationality and logic. It is bereft of warmth, colour and creativity. Princess Fiammarosa's ice palace is a place where she designs beautiful ice-blue tapestries and expresses her creativity free from the expectations and demands of the outer world. The Snow Queen, from Byatt's perspective, can be seen as a woman who has chosen isolation as a way to preserve her own creative and intellectual integrity. In *Mirror, Mirror on the Wall*, Byatt comments on her own story, "Cold", writing about the "...frightening loneliness of cleverness, the cold distance of seeing the world through art, of putting a frame around things" (67). Thus, in "Cold", Byatt reimagines the Snow Queen's ice palace as a place of creativity, a feminine space where a woman can produce art.

Each writer, while clearly inspired by the way that men and women are represented in Andersen's tale, takes a different approach to addressing issues relating to gender in their own stories. Block's approach is most clearly based on Andersen's story, with her Gerda, Kay and Snow Queen characters closely resembling Andersen's. Lackey has interpreted the characters in a fairly two-dimensional fashion, reminiscent of Walt Disney's simplistic rendering of fairy tale characters, depicting the Snow Queen as a vain, feminist villain, preoccupied with power. Byatt's interpretation of the characters is very subtle, with the Kay and Snow

Queen characters being combined to produce a far more human and comprehensible Snow Queen figure.

Inspired by themes

The fantastic

A defining characteristic of traditional fairy tales is that they combine elements that are both magical and naturalistic. Vanessa Joosen argues that this is typical of fairy tales as presented by the Grimm brothers, Perrault, Andersen and other renowned fairy tale writers (228). Contemporary narratives derived from fairy tale structures also combine both magical and naturalistic elements, however, the methodology used in contemporary works tends to differ from that of fairy tales.

Joosen writes about stories that are based on fairy tales:

A decline of the magical is perceptible, but the supernatural does not disappear completely. Authors exploit the coincidence as an ambiguous space between magic and realism, or make ample use of stylistic and narrative devices such as metaphors, similes, or unreliable narrators to give a new dimension to elements that formerly belonged unambiguously to the realm of the supernatural. (228)

“The Snow Queen” itself features many magical elements, for example, talking animals and flowers, and the mirror. The setting, too, is otherworldly, with its stark winter landscapes and shifting Northern Lights. The writers under discussion appropriate the magical elements of “The Snow Queen”, adapting and shaping them to inform contemporary narratives. However, because the framework of “The Snow Queen” remains, like a palimpsest, below the surface of the story, the reader remains immersed in the magical world of the fairy tale.

Two of the writers, Byatt and Lackey, employ the magical elements within settings that retain strong fairy tale connotations. Block, however, has a very realistic, contemporary setting where fairy tale elements and spaces, such as the magical mirror or the Snow Queen's palace, are transformed into more familiar and mundane objects and locations. Despite this, her story has a magical, almost surreal atmosphere. When considering Block's work, it is necessary to reference that her writing is not just influenced by fairy tales, but also by magical realism. This combination is interesting because the definitive feature of magical realism is this juxtaposition of the realistic and the fabulous. This is something that magical realism has in common with fairy tales, and some commentators are of the view that magical realism to some extent evolved from the fairy tale tradition. As Joosen writes:

As the fairy tale is recycled in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, many of the traditional stories are adapted to current literary models. The novel, as one of the dominant literary genres, becomes the model to which the fairy tale is frequently assimilated, especially when adolescents or adults are the intended audience. The influence of realistic literature and magic realism is perceptible in fairy-tale retellings for all ages. (228)

Block herself references the strong influence of magic realism on her writing, and has mentioned Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1970) and Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits* (1985) as influential texts ("The Genie Story" 27). Wendy B. Faris who has written extensively on magical realism

and its relationship to post modernism suggests five primary characteristics of magical realism. Firstly, the text must include an “irreducible element” of magic. Secondly, the description in magical realism must detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world. Thirdly, the reader may experience some unsettling doubts in the effort to reconcile two contradictory understandings of events. Fourthly, the narrative merges different realms. Fifthly, magical realism disturbs received ideas about time, space and identity (7).

Faris’s definition of magical realism, with its detailed components, provides a useful framework for examining Block. Block’s story has a number of these magical realist elements, for example, the narrative is realistic but disrupted by a magical event (the appearance of the Snow Queen has a magical feel). There is a merging of different realms, for instance, there is a strong contrast between the warm, everyday feel of the protagonists’ existence in their apartment and the strange, icy world of the Snow Queen’s abode. Identity, too, in Block’s tale, is fluid and characters metamorphose; as mentioned earlier, it is unclear whether the Snow Queen is an actual woman, a figure in a pornographic movie or a metaphorical allusion to the drug, “ice”.

Latham posits that Block uses magical realist elements in this fashion because she sees adolescents as disenfranchised, and magical realism has a long history of being used as a subversive tool by those who wish to question and destabilise the assumptions of a dominant culture, in this case, the “adult” culture (60). It is interesting that Block adopts a magical realist style within a fairy tale framework as

fairy tales are traditionally aimed at younger children and, in contrast, magical realism traditionally has been aimed at an adult audience, however this is changing. By uniting these two elements, Block creates a link between childhood and adulthood that is reflected not only in the content of the story but also in the form. As David Russell explains:

Block takes stories that are, in the popular mind, most closely associated with early childhood and transforms them for the adolescent reader. These tales thus become bridges between childhood and adulthood—just as adolescence itself is a bridge. (108)

The magical realist element is not obviously present in the work of the other writers who are under discussion. Byatt's work is more clearly placed within the tradition of the literary fairy tale than that of magical realism, and only demonstrates a few of the characteristics proposed by Faris. Although there is an "irreducible element" of magic and a strong presence of the phenomenal world, the reader does not experience unsettling doubts in the effort to reconcile two contradictory understandings of events and the narrative does not merge different realms. Finally it is not clear that the story disturbs received ideas about time, space and identity. Lackey's work, too, is clearly removed from the magical realist genre and is firmly situated as fantasy.

Block's story, however, draws more heavily on the fairy tale tradition than that of magical realism. Her writing is strongly influenced by Andersen's "Snow Queen" imagery, for instance, she writes: "All that winter I painted him with his eyes like

moons or his head crowned with stars or a frozen city melting in his hands..." (210) and: "Up white marble stairs into a white marble room decorated with giant crystal snowflakes hanging from the ceiling, catching-refracting light" (224). Block's description draws on Andersen's description of the ice palace, as: "The walls of the palace were formed of the driven snow, its doors and windows of the cutting winds; there were above a hundred halls, the largest of them many miles in extent, all illuminated by the Northern Lights; all alike vast, empty, icily cold, and dazzlingly white" (147). She uses Andersen's imagery within a modern setting to nuance and to enhance mood. By juxtaposing a realistic setting against a fairy tale framework, Block is able to explore contemporary issues and dilemmas within a magical space imbued with borrowed meaning.

Lackey, in her fantasy novel, *The Wizard of London*, takes a different approach. Her story is set in Victorian England and features wizards, ghosts, magical spells and clairvoyance. As such, it does not represent a familiar contemporary landscape but rather immediately positions itself as an alternative reality. Her story directly represents both fantasy and naturalistic elements and does so with minimal use of literary devices such as metaphor or analogy. She is able to directly access the fairy tale framework as, unlike Block, her chosen genre permits magical elements. Thus, she is able to present the reader with literal representations of the symbols found in Andersen's tales, including talking birds, enchantresses and magical mirrors. Her use of "The Snow Queen" as a framework for her story is overt and direct, and is effective in quickly establishing an otherworldly ambience

to her fantasy story. For Lackey, the fairy tale framework is a shortcut to creating a credible otherworldly reality.

Byatt also uses “The Snow Queen” as a framework to create a fairy tale atmosphere in her short story, “Cold”. The tale features familiar fairy tale characters, princesses who reside in castles and whose suitors must prove their worth. There are fantastic elements, for example, a castle built of glass, wonderful gifts and a woman who bears a second skin of ice.

With the exception of Lackey’s novel, the overtly magical elements in the works are constrained. The magic in Lackey’s work is framed within the confines of the speculative fiction genre as a kind of pseudoscience. Even Byatt’s story does not dwell overly on the magical elements, for example, there are no magical mirrors, no spells or curses. This highlights one of the risks for the modern writer who chooses a fairy tale framework, that is, that the reader may not be able to suspend his or her disbelief when confronted with a contemporary narrative based on a fairy tale. Joosen speculates that writers using fairy tale elements and who set their stories in contemporary settings may be reluctant to include overt references to magical motifs. She writes:

As the genre of the fairy tale has moved into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, many readers and critics no longer seem willing to temporarily ‘suspend their disbelief.’ Moreover, when authors retell traditional fairy tales in contemporary adaptations, a decline in magical features becomes apparent, either in favor of a greater realism or in favor of greater ambiguity... (236)

The works under discussion, even those that are obviously set in modern contemporary society, all possess an “otherworldly”, fantastic atmosphere. In part, this atmosphere is derived from the underlying fairy tale framework that inspired them. The writers have borrowed the fairy tale framework of “The Snow Queen” to lend a surreal ambience to their works.

Another manifestation of the fantastic in these stories and in “The Snow Queen” is the world of dreams. The nexus between dreams and fairy stories is one that has been much explored by theorists, particularly those with an interest in Jungian psychology. Marie-Louise-Luise von Franz, a Jungian theorist, sees fairy tales as “the purest and simplest expression of collective unconscious psychic processes” (1). She sees an intrinsic relationship between dreams and fairy tales and references several early theorists who also thought along these lines. She cites Ludwig Laistner, who hypothesised that basic fairy tale and folk lore motifs derive from dreams (7) and Georg Jakob who also wrote about the connection between dreams and fairy tales (8). Thus, the Jungians believed that dreams and fairy tales were linked.

An examination of fairy tales reveals many references to dreams, and in this respect, “The Snow Queen”, is no different. For example, in Part the Fourth of “The Snow Queen”, Gerda visits a castle and experiences the following: “...there was a rushing sound as of something passing; strange-looking shadows flitted rapidly along the wall; horses with slender legs and fluttering manes; huntsmen, knights, and ladies. “These are only Dreams?” said the Raven...” and later: “She closed her

eyes and slept soundly and sweetly, and all the Dreams flitted about her: they looked like angels from heaven, and seemed to be drawing a sledge, whereon sat Kay and nodded to her: but this was only fancy, for as soon as she awoke all the beautiful visions had vanished” (138). Wolfgang Lederer makes the point that the fourth story may be read as a dream or as a vision, in which the princess and the prince are ghostly images of Gerda and Kay. Evidence that supports this is the presence of the two crows (these are referenced as “ravens” in the translation of the story that I am using) in the narrative. Crows are often associated with the world of dreams and Lederer references the fact that in Norse mythology, Odin, the father of the Gods, carries two crows on his shoulders, Thought and Memory (47).

Block, too, references the world of dreams and hallucinations in her story, however her references are somewhat oblique. The story is woven around reality and drug-induced fantasy and it is difficult for the reader to determine what is real and what is dreamed or hallucinated. Or as Jan Susina expresses it: “Francesca Lia Block deftly weaves descriptions of real and imaginary places in her contemporary literary fairy tales...” (188). Thus, the fairy tale structure in Block’s story lends itself to an exploration of dreams and of the oblivion that can come from drug abuse. In Lackey’s *The Wizard of London*, dreams are seen as unreliable and dangerous. Lackey writes: “... Peggoty passed her days as a ghost in the same way that she had passed them as a living child—wrapped in some strange dream world, half-awake and half-asleep” (252). For Lackey, the world of dreams is a threatening and uncertain place, a dangerous place inhabited by ghostlike figures caught between life and death.

Each of these writers has adopted the theme of the fantastic found in Andersen's tale and employed it for different purposes and in different ways. Lackey has adopted the theme to add a fantasy ambience to her work, but also to show that the world of dreams is unreliable, dangerous and threatening. This tends to confirm that the purpose of her adoption of a fairy tale theme is to support the status quo rather than to subvert it. After all, dreams are uncontrollable and unreliable, and are therefore more likely to be agents for change rather than agents for conformity.

Block has taken a different approach, taking the fairy tale theme of the fantastic and melding it with a contemporary environment, resulting in a strong magical realist feel. On an aesthetic level, she does this to provide a surreal ambience to her work, but it also serves to provide a bridge between the world of childhood and the world of adulthood. As she is writing for adolescents, this is a very clever way of adopting fairy tale themes to convey her message. Byatt, also, employs the theme of the fantastic for aesthetic purpose, but also to explicate the difficulties for women who need to find space in their lives for creativity. Thus, she uses the fairy tale theme of the fantastic to subvert ideas about women's and men's creativity.

Dichotomies

The Snow Queen presents dichotomies, those of feeling/thinking, emotion/rationality, cold/warmth, good/evil, religion/science. Andersen's portrayal of the division between thinking and feeling and the way he structures "The Snow Queen" around these concepts has particularly influenced the works of the writers

whose works are under discussion. The tension between these two modes of experiencing and judging the world is a major theme for Andersen's story and these two modes are personified by Gerda (feeling) and Kay (reason). In "The Snow Queen", the concepts encompassed by "thinking" are those of reason, logic, scientific method, coldness, masculinity, scepticism, criticism, cruelty, lack of sentiment, lack of emotionality and lack of imagination and creativity. The concepts encompassed by "feeling" are those of warmth, intuition, piety, meekness, emotionality, kindness, femininity, creativity, imagination, faith and trust. When Kay is wounded by the mirror shards and abducted by the Snow Queen, he becomes, like the Snow Queen, a personification of reason. As Sue Mischeff writes: "Only interested in reason, science, and pragmatics now, Kay must give up his ability to suspend his disbelief; and thus the place that imagination and goodness held in his life no longer exists." She writes that Kay's abduction means that "his journey into the cold practical world of Reason has begun" (2). Celia Catlett Anderson has commented that for Christian theologians and for Andersen, a central theme is that the test of spirit is to grow in intellectual wisdom without losing the capacity for emotion and for love. She comments that one of Andersen's strongest themes is the primacy of love over reason (36). The dichotomy of thinking/feeling is not only reflected in the characters that feature in "The Snow Queen", but also in the landscape of Andersen's tale. The home of Gerda and Kay represents feeling as evidenced by the roses, the people, the family (the grandmother). The home of the Snow Queen is quite different to this; it is cold, barren, empty of people. It features symmetry and mathematics, intellectual puzzles. There are no flowers, no other people and no family members.

Block's story, "Ice", also, is structured around the contrast between thinking and feeling. When K. is stolen away by the Snow Queen, he becomes cold and unfeeling. He forgets that the intimate conversations that he has shared with the protagonist, for example, the time when she told him that she had a rose tattooed on her wrist to remind her of her sadness after her mother's death. Lackey, too, stresses the dichotomy between thinking and feeling. She writes of her "Kay" character, David: "[It was as if] someone had taken away his heart and put a clod of frozen earth where it should have been" (293). David's coldness is equated with his obsession with logic, rationality and order. "Emotion sapped control and self-control and no Elemental Master had any business allowing that loss of control to happen" (325). Her approach to the thinking/feeling dichotomy differs somewhat to that of Andersen's. She clearly sees that the risk of embracing thinking over feeling is that emotion acts as a check on inhumanity: "And when people don't feel anything anymore, they can do bad things without really thinking about it because it doesn't matter to them" (335). Andersen's theme is more focused on "completeness" and the idea that to be a whole person, both emotion and rationality are necessary. Lackey also reflects this dichotomy by judicious use of landscape. London represents the world of thought, science and rationality, while Africa is shown to be the home of intuition, faith and spirituality. Byatt also addresses the dichotomy between thinking and feeling. Princess Fiammarosa represents reason, logic and science, while Prince Sasan represents emotion and sensibility. Byatt, however, blurs the lines between these concepts by introducing the idea that creativity is possible in both modes, providing a link between reason

and emotion. As such, her focus is more on what it means to be creative man or woman rather than what it means to be a rational woman or an emotional man.

Another dichotomy that features in Andersen's tale and the stories under discussion is that of good and evil. This contrast is found in most fairy tales, no doubt because fairy tales have traditionally performed an educative role in relation to socializing children about good and evil. Most fairy tales have "morals" intended to serve a didactic function. Bettelheim writes:

Contrary to what takes place in many modern children's stories, in fairy tales evil is as omnipresent as virtue. In practically every fairy tale good and evil are given body in the form of some figures and their actions, as good and evil are omnipresent in life and the propensities for both are present in every man. It is this duality which poses the moral problem, and requires the struggle to solve it. (18)

Beyond representing the personification of good and evil, fairy tales present models for behaviour: pious, passive young girls, and active, brave young men, who are rewarded for their efforts with marriage, titles, wealth and "happy ever after". "The Snow Queen", for example, shows that a pious, compassionate young girl can win over her childhood sweetheart, rescuing him from the clutches of a cold, heartless, older woman. Zipes wrote of Andersen (quite scathingly) that his tales: "...were written with a plump didactic purpose and were overloaded with references to normative behaviour and ideal political standards." (Fairy Tales 72).

The characters in fairy tales tend to show characteristics that are sharply polarised between extremes, for example, good/evil, beautiful/ugly, sensible/foolish. It is only rarely that a fairy tale portrays an ambiguous character. Bettelheim posits that this device enables children to more easily comprehend the differences between fantasy and real life than it would if the characters were more accurately depicted (9). These simple stereotyped characterisations are inadequate when writing for adult readers in contemporary environment. The modern reader of literary fiction is unlikely to be content with characters that represent pure “evil” or “good”. Thus, Byatt and Block’s representations of good and evil are far more nuanced than Lackey’s representations.

Fairy tales are traditionally morality tales, and “The Snow Queen” is no different in this respect. Bettelheim references the moral function of the fairy tale when he writes of a child’s experience when reading a fairy story:

He needs—and this hardly requires emphasis at this moment in our history—a moral education which subtly, and by implication only, conveys to him the advantages of moral behavior, not through abstract ethical concepts but through that which seems tangibly right and therefore meaningful to him. The child finds this kind of meaning through fairy tales.
(5)

Related to the idea of good and evil is the theme of religion (representing “good” in Andersen’s tale). This theme is strongly emphasised in “The Snow Queen” and no doubt this is a reflection of the historical period in which the story was written. The mid-nineteenth century was a time in western culture when religious institutions began to come under threat from modern science. The anxiety around this

adoption of the laws and principles of scientific method and rationalism is a central concept in Andersen's story. Celia Catlett Anderson comments that Andersen's tale constitutes a blending of both Christian and folk elements, stating: "It contains not only many magical creatures (the Snow Queen herself, a talking raven, and Finnish white witch), but also a hymn in place of the usual incantation, angels formed from the breath of prayers, and a wise old grandmother who knows both the language of ravens and that of the bible" (35). Q.D. Leavis, too, comments on how this conflict between science and faith is expressed in "The Snow Queen" when she writes:

The Snow Queen, who believes only in Intelligence, promises that if he can arrange the pieces of ice in her lake to make the word Eternity 'you shall be your own master, and I will present you with the whole world and a new pair of skates'. But he can't solve the puzzle, or free his eyes and heart from splinters of troll glass, by mathematics and science. (162).

Rather, it is only piety and faith that can save him. It can be seen therefore that "The Snow Queen" has a strong religious theme, for example, in Part the Second, Gerda learns a hymn about roses (122), when Kay is abducted by the Snow Queen, he attempts to remember the Lord's Prayer but can only remember the multiplication tables (124). Gerda overcomes the snow bees that are protecting the ice palace by reciting the Lord's Prayer. And at the end of the story, the grandmother reads a passage from the bible, "Unless ye become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (150).

A clear reference to religion is found in the first chapter of Andersen's story where the mirror is being carried to heaven but is dropped and falls. This seems to reference the "fall from grace" that characterises the biblical story of humanity's expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Another myth that features this concept is that of Icarus, who attempts to fly to heaven but whose wings are melted by the sun, causing him to fall to his death. The Icarus myth and the Garden of Eden myth both centre on the idea that knowledge, technology and science are dangerous and that they destroy one's innocence. This is clearly a theme found in "The Snow Queen", however, Andersen's focus does not appear to be purely on the dichotomy between religion and science or good and evil. His focus is broader than that, embracing the potential clash between emotionality, sensibility, imagination and science, rationality and objectivity. It would be logical therefore to assume, that a writer might use the framework of "The Snow Queen", to support the position of religion in society, that is, to support the status quo, and indeed Lackey's novel addresses this subject, touching on the conflict between science and faith. The "Kay" figure in her novel is obsessed with order and logic. Lackey echoes Andersen's work when she writes: "There was a crystalline order to cold that appealed to him as well. As every snowflake was an orderly lattice, mathematical and precise, so was the matrix of spells that controlled the cold" (150). In contrast, the "Gerda" figure is motivated by compassion and spirituality. However, the theme of spirituality is not as strongly expressed in Lackey's novel as in Andersen's work, and is not explicitly Christian in nature.

The other writers under discussion have not been engaged by Andersen's theme of faith/science or good/evil. Byatt has written about the contrast between faith and science in "The Snow Queen", stating that a message that can be read from the tale is: "Science and reason are bad, kindness is good" (67). However, these themes are not evident in her version of the tale, "Cold", rather, as mentioned, Byatt recasts the dichotomy as being between science and art.

All three writers have adopted dichotomies that are featured in Andersen's tale, for example, the struggle between good and evil, spirituality and rationality. In Andersen's story good is associated with spirituality and evil with rationality. Lackey has interpreted these themes simply, portraying stereotypical villains and heroes. She has used these themes to build a framework that tends to support the status quo rather than to subvert it. Byatt's approach has been more subtle, exploring in detail ideas around passion and art, femininity and creativity and the choices that women have to make in their lives. She has used the fairy tale themes to question the status quo and provide alternative paradigms for gender equality. Block has closely mimicked Andersen's themes, presenting an innocent, spiritual heroine and an ambiguous villain. None of the writers engaged strongly with Andersen's themes around religion and spirituality, perhaps feeling that such a discussion would have little resonance with the modern reader.

Inspired by symbols

Snow

Icy landscapes are often referenced in fairy tales and are used to symbolise themes of hardship, barrenness, cruelty, misery and despair. A cold landscape is a landscape that does not encompass change: a landscape that is static, frozen and paralysed. The landscape of "The Snow Queen" is that of an Arctic winter and Andersen's text suggests that winter in this landscape is permanent and unending. Clearly, it is a winter, not only in the climatic sense, but in the emotional sense. Kay is frozen not only physically but emotionally. Kay can be seen as alienated from society. Even before he is stolen away, the shards of mirror have already separated him from his humanity, making him cynical and cruel. When the Snow Queen abducts him, this inner isolation becomes physical and actual.

Deborah Eisenberg sees Kay's abduction and imprisonment in the Ice Palace as symbolic of depression and emotional retreat. She writes:

... who has not experienced some measure or some element of Kay's despair? Who has not, at one time or another, been paralyzed and estranged as his appetite and affection for life leaches away...Who has not, at least briefly, retreated into a shining hermetic fortress from which the rest of the world appears frozen and colorless? (108)

As well as with sadness and depression, ice and snow are closely associated with the ideas of "preservation" and "stasis". Things that are frozen last forever, for eternity, and this idea of "eternity" is a strong motif in "The Snow Queen", after all, Kay must form the word "Eternity" from ice fragments if he is to be freed from the

Snow Queen's thrall. Andersen appears to be approaching this idea of "eternity" from a Christian perspective, that is, Kay is trapped in an icy realm, devoid of emotion and warmth, and therefore is unable to gain eternal life. He cannot enter Paradise or Heaven, because of his devotion to rationality, logic and science (Purkiss 243–49). Byatt also adopts this view, writing: "The ice palace is a false eternity, a duration outside time, to be escaped from" (Bernheimer 65).

All three authors under discussion draw heavily on Andersen's imagery and symbolism around snow and ice. Lackey, for instance, recreates Andersen's ice palace, writing: "The floor, of the finest white Carerra marble, was polished to a mirror gleam. The walls were likewise of the same marble—which was a little unusual, and gave the room the look of a cube made of snow" (154). Lackey, too, sees her version of Kay, David, as being frozen. Like Kay, he is freed from his ice thrall by the compassion of a young girl: "Something broke inside him—of perhaps, it was better to say that something melted. Tears burned in his eyes as he took the child's hand; they overflowed and trickled down his cheeks" (374). Thus, although Lackey recreates the ice palace in white marble, she still uses the symbolism of snow and ice almost exactly as Andersen does, to signify emotional stasis.

Byatt employs the symbols of snow and ice in a number of ways in her short story, "Cold". She uses these symbols almost interchangeably and they occur frequently in her stories: for example, Gillian Perholt's glass paperweights, the glass bottle in which the djinn is imprisoned in "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye", the glass key and box in Byatt's retelling of the Grimms' "The Glass Coffin," and the ice of "Cold"

(Tiffin 52). As mentioned, in "Cold", Byatt directly relates these symbols to concepts around art and creativity. In her essay, "Ice, Snow, Glass", a discussion of these symbols in her writing, Byatt comments that ice and glass stories all "have images of art" (60). This is particularly obvious in "Cold", where numerous connections are made between the concepts of ice/glass and art/creativity, for example, the many intricate and fantastic glass gifts that are given to Fiammarosa by Prince Sasan.

As well as using ice as a symbol for creativity, Byatt, like Andersen and Block, uses it to reference emotional coldness. Fiammarosa is portrayed as an "ice woman" not only in her predilection for cold climes, but also emotionally: "And her cold eye, and her cold mind, had measured the gulf between what Hugh felt for her and what she felt for him" (136), or "Fiammarosa noticed, in her cool mind, that she did not love Hugh, whatever love was" (133). For Byatt, ice is a metaphor that connects both the concepts of creativity and of objectivity. As Tiffin writes, for Byatt ice and glass become a metaphor both for art itself, "putting a frame round things," and for intellectual distance (55).

The concept of cold cannot be discussed without consideration of its opposite, warmth. Winter is a season, and seasons must progress. So, although ice may appear to be eternal, in fact, it melts. Spring and summer must follow. So, the symbols of ice/snow/winter can be seen to also represent the idea that ultimately there must be a thaw and change must come. As Byatt writes: "Ice and snow are part of the cycle of the seasons, and life-forms frozen and dormant are also

preserved in the cold. Neither Kay nor Snow White are dead; they are part of a vegetation myth, waiting for the spring” (Bernheimer 71). Thus, all three stories, like Andersen’s, are complete when the ice melts, when emotions are reclaimed and the metaphorical winter is over.

Mirrors

Mirrors are a recurrent theme in fairy tales and mythology and often have magical qualities, for example, the mirror belonging to the Queen in “Snow White and the Seven Dwarves”, which exposes the truth and never lies. There is a whole room lined with mirrors in “The Beauty and the Beast”. Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* features a mirror, a looking-glass, that transports Alice to another world. A mirror features in Andersen’s “The Emperor’s New Clothes”; Medusa is slain by a mirror (a shiny brass shield); and so on. In these stories, mirrors symbolise a range of concepts, including, most notably, truth, vanity and magic. They can represent self-absorption, femininity, deceit, self-knowledge and contemplation. Mirrors offer the viewer the opportunity to engage in self-reflection, to examine the self critically or with admiration.

Another way of looking at a mirror is as a tool to provide a unified view of the self. Jacques Lacan, a psychoanalyst, posited that when young children initially view themselves in a mirror that they begin to form a view of themselves as an entire, unified being rather than as fragmented (166). Andersen’s tale, too, addresses fragmentation, both the literal fragmentation of the Magician’s evil mirror and the emotional, psychological fragmentation of Kay’s personality. When Kay is united

with Gerda, his personality is reintegrated and he is no longer merely cold, logical and rational; he becomes reconnected to his emotions and spirituality. This theme is reiterated in all the texts under discussion.

The mirror in Andersen's story is essential to the unfolding of the narrative as it precipitates the events that constitute the story. The first chapter features the fracturing of the mirror when it is dropped from the heavens. Two shards of this mirror lodge in the heart and eye of Kay, causing him to regard the world from an illusionary position where everything viewed is perceived as misshapen, ugly and distorted. Lederer notes that a reflective surface can represent the illusion of the senses in which the reality of the soul is misshaped. He references Gnostic doctrines where God was not considered to be responsible for the creation of the world. Rather, the world was seen as a result of a separation from the realm of the spirit. The world was seen as an illusion created by an evil demiurge (6–7). Thus, the mirror in "The Snow Queen" represents perception, perspective and vision, and how these vary among individuals. The mirror offers the viewer a preconceived vision of reality, a distorted, negative view that eschews all that is beautiful or good.

Most literature on "The Snow Queen" focuses on the mirror's function of reflecting others in a critical light rather than on reflecting the self. The obvious use of a mirror is to observe oneself rather than to observe others, yet Andersen's tale makes only oblique references to this, for example, he writes that:

The handsomest persons appeared odious, or as if standing upon their heads, their features being so distorted that their

friends could never have recognised them. Moreover, if one of them had a freckle, he might be sure that it would seem to spread over the nose and mouth; and if a good or pious thought glanced across his mind, a wrinkle was seen in the mirror. (118)

The above passage does not make it clear who is the observer and who is observed. Furthermore, Andersen goes on to write:

Those who frequented the school of magic where he taught spread abroad the fame of this wonderful mirror, and declared that, by its means, the world and its inhabitants might be seen now, for the first time, as they really were. (118)

It is clear from this passage that the intention of Andersen's mirror, its primary purpose, is as a tool to observe others. The idea that a mirror shard can distort vision seems to be intrinsically inaccurate. A shard of mirror will reflect light not filter light or distort vision. It appears that Andersen's mirror is a lens rather than a reflective surface. This is an idea that Byatt touches on in "Cold", when she writes of Fiammarosa: "She had frozen eyelashes and saw the world through an ice-lens..." (127). In reviewing other fairy tales that feature mirrors, I was unable to find a mirror that was used in this same way. All other mirrors are used to view the self. Andersen has chosen to downplay or even omit the main function of a mirror, to reflect the self, to provide insight into the self and to view the self from the perspective of the other. Presumably, if Kay had looked into a mirror, or even used his sceptical, cruel and critical attitude to analyse himself, he would have seen his own flaws and shortcomings. However, this isn't mentioned in the narrative. As earlier mentioned, some writers have hypothesised that Kay's experience epitomises that of those who suffer from chronic depression, who become without

affect, cold and isolated. An unstated effect of the mirror may have been to turn Kay against himself, to see himself as unworthy, imperfect and flawed.

In fairy tales, mirrors are often depicted as dangerous. They are frequently portrayed as tools that are used for evil, usually by women. Generally, the mirror is seen as a purely feminine tool, designed to superficially examine oneself and to admire one's own beauty or to lament one's inadequacy. Vanity, after all, is often viewed as a purely feminine flaw. Andersen, however, does not take this position. In "The Snow Queen", it is a male figure, a magician that creates the mirror, and it is a male who is affected by the mirror, using it a tool to view the world. Also, in Andersen's, "The Emperor's New Clothes", it is a male whose vanity is reflected in a mirror. The character that the reader would most expect to interact with the mirror in "The Snow Queen", the Snow Queen herself, never even looks into a mirror. However, she certainly appears to take advantage of the effect of the broken mirror shards when she abducts Kay; it may be his icy, mirror-damaged nature that initially attracts her attention to him. This connection between the Snow Queen and the mirror is confusing as there does not appear to be a direct causal link between the creation and breakage of the mirror, and the appearance of the Snow Queen. From a narrative point of view, this makes little sense. When I read this story as a child, I found it hard to understand that the Magician/Hobgoblin and the Snow Queen were two different entities with different *raisons d'être*. It makes more sense that the Snow Queen would be the one to create an evil distorting mirror and that she would take advantage of its shattering to steal away young children. As the story stands, however, it would appear that the Snow Queen's actions are

independent of the accident with the mirror, that she is merely an opportunist.

However, a link between the Snow Queen and the Magician may be found in the ice lake that is located in the Snow Queen's palace. It seems likely that this ice lake is in fact the shattered mirror. Andersen does at one point refer to the lake as being a mirror:

In the midst of the empty, interminable snow-saloon lay a frozen lake: it was broken into a thousand pieces; but these pieces so exactly resembled each other, that the breaking of them might well be deemed a work of more than human skill. The Snow Queen, when at home, always sat in the centre of this lake; she used to say that she was then sitting on the Mirror of Reason, and that hers was the best—indeed, the only one—in the world. (147)

It makes sense that this frozen lake, the Mirror of Reason is, in fact, the very same mirror that was dropped by the Magician, especially as this mirror, like the Magician's, is broken into pieces. Furthermore, the name of the lake, "The Mirror of Reason," is a strong clue that the two mirrors are one and the same, as we know the Magician's mirror causes people to look at the world from a purely scientific, rational viewpoint.

So, assuming that the frozen lake is, in fact, the original Magician's mirror, this leads to some obvious questions. From where did the Snow Queen obtain all these fragments of the original broken mirror? Why is she collecting them? Why does she bring Kay, who has two pieces of the mirror within his body, to her palace? None of the writers under discussion engage with the theme of the mirror to this level, and perhaps this is something of a lost opportunity. Theoretically, it would be possible

to interpret the purpose of the mirror in Andersen's tale in a multitude of ways and apply those interpretations to contemporary feminist stories. It would be interesting to reinterpret the actions and motives of the Snow Queen in a positive feminist light, for example, she could be collecting the pieces of the mirror to remove them from the wider world. So, unfortunately, the writers under discussion tend not to engage with the concept of Andersen's mirror in depth. Block uses the structural framework of Andersen's mirror indirectly in her story, "Ice", only referencing the mirror when her heroine goes to a nightclub called "The Mirror" to listen to a young man sing (204). She also refers, poetically, to "his glass-stung eyes" (204). Block takes the symbol of the mirror from "The Snow Queen" and re-imagines it, translating it into a modern symbol of vanity and shallowness; a night club. Thus the mirror is subverted and transformed, taking on the form of a non-magical object. In this context, the mirror is a metaphor, the function of which is performed by a non-magical medium that has the same function (Joosen 232). This apt metaphor compares the often cruel and demeaning night club environment with the equally demoralising effects of Andersen's unforgiving mirror.

Mercedes Lackey in *The Wizard of London*, in contrast, chooses not to structure her story around a metaphorical mirror but makes a direct reference: "... the image before her [in the mirror] aged, aged rapidly, until what stood before her was a hideously distorted reflection of an old, senile and withered crone ... With a gasp, she stepped forward and involuntarily touched the mirror" (159). Lackey's mirror, although obviously inspired by Andersen's mirror, differs in an important way; it is not a mirror that emphasises flaws but rather one that predicts aging and natural

decay. It is a mirror that like the evil Queen's mirror in "Snow White and the Seven Dwarves" (Grimm brothers) focuses attention on aging and the loss of feminine beauty and power. Lackey's mirror is used to show the shallowness and vanity of Lady Cordelia; her obsession with beauty, power and youth. These are not obsessions that appear to drive Andersen's more enigmatic Snow Queen. Also, unlike Andersen's mirror, Lackey's mirror has a malicious purpose. It aims to corrupt those who look into it, luring the viewer into a devilish contract to preserve youth and beauty.

Byatt examines the idea of the mirror in a more fluid and flexible way. Of all three writers, she most fully engages with the idea that Andersen's mirror has a multiplicity of meanings and functions. Her story references ice, glass and mirrors in a complex and interwoven fashion where all three substances represent a multitude of meanings: self-awareness, vision, art, creativity and complex gender dynamics. For example, Byatt directly touches on the theme of gender difference when she writes: "And glass is not ice" (148). In this example, "ice" represents the feminine, and "glass" the masculine. Byatt does, however, directly pay homage to Andersen's mirror once, when she writes: "...[she] became curiously attached to a little silver hand-mirror, engraved with twining roses..." (120). As mentioned earlier, Byatt also addresses the idea that the mirror is a kind of lens, when she references Fiammarosa's vision being filtered through ice.

Each writer has been inspired to take the symbol of the mirror from Andersen's tale and employ it differently. Block uses the mirror metaphorically, reimagining it as a

nightclub. She uses it to symbolise shallowness, vanity and the ugly side of contemporary life. Lackey retains the mirror's magical properties but borrows its characteristics from other fairy tales, for example, the Grimm brothers' "Snow White and the Seven Dwarves". Her use of the mirror supports the traditional view of mirrors as symbols of feminine vanity. Byatt combines the ideas of ice/glass/mirrors into one theme, but pays homage to Andersen's mirror by referencing it as a favourite possession of Fiammarosa (120). None of the writers fully engage with the complexity of Andersen's mirror, for example, no exploration is made of Andersen's idea that the mirror is a tool for observing others rather than the self.

Chapter 3: The Snow Queen in “Cold Vision”

In framing my story, “Cold Vision”, around a fairy tale, I follow in a long line of Australian writers. According to Lisa M. Fiander many Australian novels are either inspired by or reference fairy tales, for example, Peter Carey’s *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith*, written in 1994, posits a world where fairy tales have replaced traditional religion. In Rodney Hall’s novel, for example, *The Second Bridegroom*, written in 1991, an escaped convict sees his journey through the tangled forests of New South Wales in the 1830s as a heroic fairy tale quest (161). Other contemporary Australian novels in this mould include Murray Bail’s *Eucalyptus* which borrows its structure from a classic fairy-tale plotline—a father’s test of his daughter’s suitors by setting an impossible task, in this case, the naming of all the Eucalyptus trees in a garden. Or Janette Turner Hospital’s *Charades* which is narrated by a modern-day Scherherzade.

It is more difficult to find stories by Australian writers that are directly influenced by *The Snow Queen*. In 2003, however, Mardi McConnochie wrote a novel called *The Snow Queen*. This novel is about a cold, rational, disciplined Russian-born dancer, Galina, who forms Australia’s first professional ballet troupe. A talented young man joins the troupe and he and Galina enact the story of “The Snow Queen”. There may be other stories deliberately based on “The Snow Queen”, but it is difficult to identify these tales without knowing the author’s intentions at the time of writing.

My own novel, “Cold Vision” is a contemporary novel set in Canberra, and I consciously based it on my favourite fairy tale, “The Snow Queen”. “Cold Vision”

features a female protagonist, Evon, who is employed as a compliance officer with the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. Evon prizes her own rationality and objectivity, remaining untouched by the tales of human tragedy that she witnesses. She embodies the Department of Immigration and Citizenship's hard-line approach to enforcing immigration law. The story follows Evon as she performs her role as an immigration compliance officer and documents her growing humanity and compassion.

"Cold Vision" was conceived in 2004 when I was employed as a compliance officer for the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. The responsibilities of a compliance officer include the location of unlawful non-citizens and the regularisation of their visa status. "Regularisation", a bureaucratic euphemism, can mean the granting of another visa or it can mean the detention of the person and his or her removal to his or her home country. It can even refer to the death of the person. All of these are considered to be immigration outcomes. In my role as a compliance officer, I became aware of endemic malpractice in the compliance and detention areas of the department. Compliance officers were driven by the need to meet targets. "Targets", in compliance, referred to the numbers of people who were located or detained. Targets were directly linked to funding, so if the required number of people were not located or detained then resources were reduced. As a result of this, compliance managers were chiefly concerned with the numbers of people caught rather than providing people with genuine, humane options to resolve their compliance status. At times, this imperative to meet targets resulted in

compliance officers disregarding the legislation and regulations in order to cancel the visas of people who were not in breach of visa conditions.

As a compliance officer, I participated in a large number of operations in Western Australia. I raided restaurants, building sites, markets, orchards and brothels. I located many unlawful non-citizens, cancelled many visas, and detained many people. I interacted with people who were desperate, afraid and very vulnerable. In this role, I was increasingly struck by the contradiction between the rhetoric of the public service and the reality of my experiences as public servant. The department spoke about “diversity” and being “fair and reasonable”. It proclaimed itself “open and accountable”. Yet, every day, compliance teams operated in an environment that fostered xenophobia, arbitrary justice and secrecy. I became fascinated by the gap between what is imagined to be real, what is dreamed and envisaged, and what is actual. The novel explores the cognitive dissonance provoked by the contrast of the everyday operations of the department with the strongly humanitarian rhetoric espoused by the government. The novel aims to explore the concept that there is a major disconnect between what Australia believes itself to be, and what Australia actually is. The novel discusses the idea that while Australia believes itself to be an enlightened Western country with strong humanist values, there is a dark side to Australia’s psyche, which is racist, inhumane, cruel and terribly cold. These are ideas that have also been examined by many academics and commentators within Australia, for instance, writers such as Mary Crock, Julian Burnside, Robert Manne and David Marr, David Corlett, Margo O’Neill and Jacquie Everitt. These writers have focussed on the plight of refugees, but the focus of my

story is on the way the less visible “compliance case load” of overstayers and people in breach of their visa conditions is managed by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

I have discussed how other writers (for example, Block) have used the structure of “The Snow Queen” to address contemporary issues in society. “Cold Vision” also uses the framework of “The Snow Queen” in this way, to address issues that cause *angst* in modern Australian society. In contemporary Australia, there are few issues that generate more anxiety than those of immigration, otherness and social cohesion. “Cold Vision” examines these issues from an intimate perspective. The fairy tale structure with its contrasting elements of fantasy and naturalism, and with its inherent focus on matters that cause *angst*, seems an appropriate vehicle for the analysis of questions around racism, inhumanity and injustice.

When I set out to write this story, I had the aim of exposing the unjust way that the Department of Immigration and Citizenship performed its functions. It would be natural to assume that the best way of doing this would be in the form of non-fiction. This was an option adopted, for instance, by Peter Mitchell, also an immigration compliance officer, who wrote his story, *A Compassionate Bastard*, from the perspective of his role as the manager of the Villawood detention centre. H. Martin also approached this topic from a documentary perspective, penning his non-fiction work, *Angels and Arrogant Gods*, that recorded the accounts of immigration officers from 1945–1985. However, this was not an option that appealed to me. I have always had a fascination with fairy tales, fantasy and

dreams, and I wished to explore questions around what is ideal and what is real, about subversion of the norm, and about good and evil with the magical ambience that is found in the fairy tale genre. Furthermore, I had little appetite for writing a non-fictional work that would potentially position me as a whistle blower, particularly as I was an employee of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship at the time I was writing. I wished to examine ideas around what is moral without the burden of responsibility, to expose social injustice without drawing the attention of government and other institutions of authority. Zipes speaks of the role of modern fairy tales in exposing social injustice, especially where it is supported by morally corrupt government and other institutions of authority.

As long as there are conflicts and different voices and interests articulated within cultural fields, there will always be hope that folk and fairy tales may provide some counsel and moral learning to expose the crazed drive for power that many individual politicians, corporate leaders, governments, church leaders and petty tyrants evince and to pierce the hypocrisy of their moral stances. (Oxford Companion x)

This viewpoint is of particular interest to me, for in writing “Cold Vision” I aimed to expose some of the cruelty and injustice that I felt was at the core of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship’s operations. “Cold Vision” attempts to tell a morality tale. The moral of “The Snow Queen” can be found in its appeal to piety, goodness, and purity of heart as powers to overcome the forces of rationalism and scientific enlightenment. While this is also a theme in my novel, that is, the importance of true humanity and compassion when dealing with the vulnerable, the focus of my story is on hypocrisy. I seek to comment on the way

that government and indeed society pays mere lip service to compassion while treating people with cold indifference, and sometimes, outright cruelty.

The fairy tale structure seemed ideal to convey my message for two reasons. Firstly, fairy tales have a long history of providing moral and ethical guidance, and secondly, fairy tales have a modern history of being used to challenge societal expectations, particularly those around "otherness". Because I wanted to convey a clear moral message and a critique of specific government policies, it was necessary for me to clearly place the novel geographically and temporally. In this way, my novel differs from a fairy tale. Fairy tales traditionally take place in unspecified locations, for example, in a forest, in a land far far away, in a castle and so on. It is rare that a fairy story is set in a recognisable time and place, for instance, it is not possible to determine the name or location of the woods where Little Red-Riding Hood met the wolf, or even in what country she lived. The reader does not know where Sleeping Beauty's castle is located or where Snow White found the seven dwarves. When reading a fairy tale, we have the sense that the story took place a long time ago in some pre-industrial age, or as many fairy tales describe it, "once upon a time". As a reader, we have no idea *when* this time might have been (Joosen 236). However, my novel is clearly set in Canberra in Australia, and I reference features of Canberra such as Parliament House, the fountain in Lake Burley Griffin, the hot air balloons that are often seen over the city, the ubiquitous white cockatoos and recognisable suburban locations such as Belconnen and Gold Creek village. I did this because I wanted to clearly place the story in Australia and in the capital city/seat of government. This was important to

me because my novel is commenting on and critiquing Australia rather than making broad generic statements about the human condition.

Inspired by structure

In the previous chapter, I explored the way that Block uses the structure of Andersen's "The Snow Queen" as a framework for her story, "Ice". To do this, I used Propp's approach to the morphology of the folk tale. In this section, a similar approach will be taken to the examination of "Cold Vision".

"Cold Vision" is only loosely based on the structure of "The Snow Queen" and does not directly reflect the order of events that take place. Many of the functions are not found in the novel, and those that are found are frequently swapped between the roles of the hero and the victim (Bell and Evon respectively). Further, the functions that are integrated into the novel are more often revealed as flashbacks or as recollections and are thus not in the order that Propp considered essential to folk tale morphology. "Cold Vision" is inspired more by the themes, motifs, characterisation and approach to gender of "The Snow Queen" than by its structure. This will be demonstrated by a brief outline of how Propp's functions relate to "Cold Vision" and to "The Snow Queen".

Stage one, when a member of the family absents himself from home, occurs in "Cold Vision" when Evon removes herself emotionally from her family. This takes place in the novel when Evon comes to believe that her dreams caused her mother's death and her father's abandonment.

In stage two, an interdiction is addressed to the hero". In "Cold Vision", it is Evon who receives the interdiction. This occurs when I write that: "Evon had not applied to work in compliance, and that, in fact, she had clearly written on her performance agreement that she did not want to work in the area. Naturally, this had resulted in her immediate placement as a compliance officer" (139). The interdiction is violated, stage three, when the villain appears. In "Cold Vision", the villain is initially represented as Steph, the compliance manager: "Steph, with her "corporate" Goth black skirt, fishnets and stilettos was difficult to argue with and quite intimidating" (139).

Stage four, where the villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance is not represented in "Cold Vision", and stage five, where the villain receives information about his victim, are indirectly referenced when Evon describes how the Department of Immigration and Citizenship places people in roles that bear little relationship to their skill sets or their preferences (177).

In stage six, the villain attempts to deceive his victim in order to take possession of him or his belongings. This occurs in "Cold Vision" where Steph persuades Evon that it would be a good career move to work in compliance: "Later, she'd spoken to Steph, the compliance manager, about her reservations, but Steph had smoothly persuaded her that it would be a good career move and that she should give it a try" (139). In step seven, the victim submits to deception and thereby unwittingly

helps his enemy. This takes place in “Cold Vision” when Evon accepts the position in compliance without resisting strongly: “It seemed easier to just agree than to fight over the decision” (139).

In stage eight, the villain causes harm or injury to a member of a family. In “Cold Vision”, Evon is harmed by her work in compliance. She is already damaged by her childhood experiences (this is analogous to the harm that Kay experiences when wounded by the shards from the broken mirror), and working for the Department of Immigration and Citizenship worsens her injuries (this is analogous to Kay’s emotional coldness being exacerbated by his abduction by the Snow Queen and his residence in the Ice Palace). Stage eight is the point where “Cold Vision” commences, when the reader first meets Evon who is participating in a compliance operation in a brothel. This is the equivalent to Andersen’s “part the seventh” where Gerda finds Kay in the Snow Queen’s ice palace. When we meet Evon, she has already become emotionally frozen and lost her humanity. She is like Kay who at this point in “The Snow Queen” is described by Andersen thus: “... the Snow Queen had kissed away the shrinking feeling he used to experience, and his heart was like a lump of ice” (147).

In stages nine and ten, the hero is approached with a request or a command and decides to take counteraction. In the case of “The Snow Queen”, these are the stages where Gerda decides to rescue Kay. This occurs when Evon realises that she might be in need of rescuing, where Evon thinks: “Was Bell flirting with her?

They were complete opposites. Perhaps he liked a challenge. She was probably the only woman in Australia who hadn't offered herself to him. More likely, he thought she needed rescuing. What an irritating thought!" (293). Stage eleven is where the hero leaves home to begin his journey. In "Cold Vision", this occurs when Evon begins to work for the Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

Stage twelve is where the protagonist is tested, interrogated or attacked. The "attack" occurs when Evon is struck by a compliance client while participating in a compliance operation at a restaurant. Evon is "tested" numerous times, for example, when a removee commits suicide while in transit. Stages thirteen and fourteen, where the hero reacts to the actions of the future donor and acquires the use of a magical agent, can be found in the chapter of the novel where Evon meets the magical "donor" character, Raven, whose magical gifts (beads) prompt her to speak about the traumatic events of her childhood.

Stage fifteen entails the hero being transferred, delivered or led to the whereabouts of an object of search. In "The Snow Queen" this is where Gerda travels to Lapland and Finmark to find Kay. There is no equivalent to this stage in "Cold Vision". In stage sixteen, the hero and the villain engage in direct conflict. Again, this stage does not take place in "Cold Vision". However, this stage is not strongly represented in "The Snow Queen" either. As mentioned earlier, Gerda and the Snow Queen never directly confront each other. In stage seventeen, the hero is branded. This function is not directly represented in "The Snow Queen", however

arguably may be represented by Kay being described as “blue and black” with cold. However, the branding is present in “Cold Vision” and is represented by Gerda obtaining a tattoo on her wrist of a snowflake. This is the same approach that is used by Block in “Ice”, where her protagonist has a tattoo of a rose on her wrist.

In stages eighteen and nineteen, the villain is defeated and resolution is reached, for example, the victim is rescued. This function is not explicitly found in “Cold Vision”, however, in my view, the villain that has to be defeated in “Cold Vision” is an “inner villain”, that is, the villain is Evon’s inner coldness and inhumanity. This reflects the structure of “The Snow Queen” where the villain is conspicuously absent in the final scenes when Kay is rescued by Gerda. Thus, the “villain” is defeated in “Cold Vision” in chapter seventeen where Evon chooses to release Raven from detention on a bridging visa valid for one hundred years. In stage twenty, the hero returns. Thus, it is Evon who returns to her home and her family: “Amber sunshine washed into the room, tinting the cream carpet gold, and spraying a shower of rainbows against the wall...The sunlight slid over her skin like melting butter, warm and creamy, smoothing away her goose bumps...I’m home and safe” (436).

Like Andersen’s “The Snow Queen” and Block’s “Ice” the story does not explicitly go on to include Propp’s functions 21 through to 31. Rather, the story concludes with the hero/victim’s return. When I wrote “Cold Vision”, I was influenced by the

journey that Gerda underwent in "The Snow Queen". Her departure, her trials and her return, were the structuring elements that I consciously built into the novel. I was aware that I had a number of stories that I wished to tell about events that I had experienced while working as a compliance officer, and I looked for a cohesive way of telling those stories. Andersen's structure appeared well suited to that goal, and I broadly adopted ideas from the story, rather than slavishly following the detail of the structure. For example, "The Snow Queen" includes a chapter where flowers tell their individual stories to Gerda. These are magical, talking flowers and each has a tale to tell. In my novel, I have chosen to emphasise the subtext of eroticism that is evident in the tales that the flowers tell in the rose garden.

Jorgen Dines Johansen writes:

Three of these embedded stories are blatantly erotic: the tiger lily's about a sexual desire that burns hotter than the consuming fire of a funeral pyre... The hyacinth's story describes the fragrance that grows even stronger; and the account of the three sisters who vanish and die in the forest is laden with erotic overtones as well. In the last story, the protagonist, the narcissus-ballerina is described as follows... See how she stretches out her legs, as if she were showing off on a stem. I can see myself, I can see myself... It does not take much effort to infer what is also implied in this self-mirroring. (216)

Therefore, the flower garden in Andersen's story is represented in my novel by the brothel where the sex workers are named after flowers. The stories that are told by the flowers appear in the vignettes that are part of my novel, that is, they are the stories that are told by the people that Evon detains. My intention with these stories

was to show that every detainee has a personal story, often a tragic story, to tell that explains how they have come to the attention of the government. This parallels “The Snow Queen”, where Andersen writes: “But each flower, as it stood in the sunshine, dreamed only of its own little fairy tale of history... Gerda heard many stories from the flowers...” (129). Andersen’s tale has a motif of storytelling that is threaded throughout the narrative but which is exemplified by the part of the story that deals with the flower garden. It makes sense that Andersen, as a writer, should have a strong interest in storytelling and this interest is reflected in the text, for example, the grandmother tells Gerda and Kay a story about the Snow Queen, the flowers tell Gerda their stories, the Raven tells a story and Gerda tells everyone she encounters her story of the abduction of Kay (Mischeff 1). I chose to reflect this aspect of Andersen’s structure in my novel. Many of the compliance clients relate their tales to Evon, for example, Mrs Parker tells Evon about her life and history as a woman who was trafficked into the sex trade. Each compliance operation that takes place is presented as a vignette, offering insight into the business of immigration compliance and into the lives of people who fall foul of Australia’s immigration law.

The way Andersen structured his ending also informed my work on my novel. In the first draft of the novel, I moved away from Andersen’s happy ending and wrote a conclusion where Evon awakens to find that her husband and child were merely “dream things”, that is, they did not exist and never had. I could not make this ending work in a satisfactory fashion despite several approaches. My first approach was to provide hints throughout the narrative that the family was not real,

for example, having Evon never mention her family to third parties, having the daughter and husband appear as less developed characters and the house being empty whenever someone visited Evon's home. This approach was problematic as part of the purpose for Evon having a family was to make her a more sympathetic character. Once I introduced doubt about Evon's family's existence, Evon became less sympathetic.

My second approach was to make the family hyper-real. I attempted to portray them very realistically, and then to expose their non-existence as a "twist" at the end of the novel. This approach was also unsatisfactory, as I felt that the reader would feel betrayed by such a conclusion. At this point, I turned again to Andersen, and modelled my ending on "The Snow Queen". In Andersen's tale the two children return to their family (the grandmother) and to the warmth and sunshine of their home. Like Andersen's protagonists, Evon returns to her family and her home, and to the sunshine. This provided a far more satisfying ending.

So, broadly speaking, "Cold Vision" follows the structure of "The Snow Queen". I chose to use the fairy tale framework to shape the story and provide it with forward impetus. When I encountered difficulties with the progression of the story, in particular, the ending, I was able to access Andersen's techniques to arrive at a satisfactory resolution.

Inspired by gender

As mentioned earlier, Andersen's approach to gender is unusual for unlike most traditional fairy tales, his story features a large number of female characters. "Cold Vision" does not follow this structure, however, it does retain the female protagonist. In "Cold Vision", the major characters are predominantly male, for example, most members of the compliance team (Frederick, Willy and Bell) are male and so is Raven. The only major characters who are female are Evon and Rose. The minor characters are approximately fifty/fifty male and female.

In examining "Cold Vision" from a feminist perspective, there is little to admire in the female characters. The lead female characters, Evon, Steph and Rose, are flawed. Evon is emotionally frozen, cruel and inflexible. Steph is shallow and ambitious. Rose is unstable and dishonest. They have very few redeeming qualities, although perhaps Evon's strength, independence and competence qualify as positive traits. In comparison, the lead male characters are more admirable: Bell is honest and compassionate. Frederick is intelligent, calm and a voice of reason. Alex is sincere and humane. These characters are shown to have only minimal flaws, for example, Bell is shown to be somewhat vain and a "player". This portrayal of the characters in "Cold Vision" is in contrast to the characters that are depicted in "The Snow Queen" where the female characters are portrayed, overall, in a positive fashion.

When I began to think about writing "Cold Vision", I found myself rather more interested in the character of Kay than I did in Gerda. I was intrigued by his lack of

affect, his cold rationality and his objectivity. In fact, I identified with the character and because of this, I wished to explore it further. So, I made the decision to swap the genders of Kay and Gerda. My protagonist, Evon, with her limited emotional range took on the role of Kay and is contrasted with the character, Bell, who represents Gerda. The tension that underlies Evon and Bell's relationship results from the uncertainty of whether Evon will "freeze" Bell's humanity or whether Bell will succeed in melting Evon's frigid world-view. The decision to swap the gender of the two protagonists had a critical effect on the portrayal of gender within this novel, and resulted in some unforeseen consequences that I shall outline later in this chapter.

Apart from the gender swap, the characters in "Cold Vision" are closely based on those from "The Snow Queen". However, while they are inspired by the fairy tale characters found in "The Snow Queen", they are more complex and less stereotyped. Bell, who is inspired by Gerda in Andersen's tale (the embodiment of virtue and humanity), is shown to have human failings, such as vanity and promiscuity. Evon, who represents Kay, is shown to have a family and a sense of humour.

Evon, with her limited emotional range and cold affect, takes on the role of Kay, the boy who is stolen away by the Snow Queen. Evon, like Kay, is taken to a cold and inhumane environment, represented in "Cold Vision" by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. Like Kay, Evon becomes more and more frozen emotionally and is impervious to her frozen state. Kay is obsessed with solving ice

puzzles. Evon, too, is obsessed with puzzles. She sees each compliance case as a puzzle that has to be solved. She does so coldly and logically with no compassion, without thinking of the human beings who are affected by her actions. Evon is contrasted with the character, Bell, who represents Gerda. Bell is a warm character who brings humanity to his role as an immigration compliance officer. Bell, saves the female protagonist with the power of love and through his intrinsic humanity rather than through violence or aggression.

By switching the genders of Kay and Gerda, I had thought to overcome preconceived ideas of feminine emotionality. The male protagonist, Bell, becomes caring and loving, the female hard and cold. This gender swap, however, does not subvert gender roles as successfully as I intended. An unanticipated consequence of the gender swap was that it rewrote Andersen's story in accordance with the traditional idea that it is a man who rescues a woman. Furthermore, the "rescue" of Evon results in the thawing of her frozen emotions. She becomes more in touch with her feelings, becoming more compassionate and more humane. At the conclusion of the story, she reconnects with her family. This could easily be interpreted as a moral lesson designed to convey the message that the role of a woman is not to be cold, rational, unemotional and work orientated, but rather warm, feeling and family orientated. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this is also a problem that Byatt encountered when changing the genders of the Kay and Gerda characters.

A further problem that I encountered when swapping the genders of the two main characters was that I now had a protagonist that readers were likely to find unsympathetic. The fact that the novel was written exclusively from the point of view of Evon exacerbated this problem as the reader was unable to escape from Evon's world-view. I suspect that if Evon had been a male character (as in Andersen's tale) then readers would be more willing to accept the traits of cold rationality, sarcasm and lack of emotion. However, I received feedback from several readers, including my university supervisor at the time, that a female character, a mother, who behaved this way, was unpalatable to readers. To address this problem, I took three approaches. Firstly, I added a (somewhat dark) sense of humour to Evon's personality. Secondly, I increased the number of flashbacks to Evon's childhood. I hoped that by showing Evon as a vulnerable child, the reader would be more likely to empathise with her. Thirdly, I showed that she is compassionate towards people who are in need (Alex and Mrs Parker). Unfortunately, I suspect that readers still find Evon a difficult character to like, and I believe that I cannot address this problem without making Evon stereotypically feminine. This is not a compromise that I am willing to make.

An obvious character omitted from "Cold Vision" is that of the Snow Queen herself. This was a conscious choice on my part as I wished, like Andersen, to focus more on the effects of the Snow Queen's presence rather than on the character herself. Andersen's Snow Queen, as mentioned earlier in the exegesis, is enigmatic and unknowable. Furthermore, she is mostly absent from the narrative. Byatt, in "Cold", attempted to make her Snow Queen figure, Fiammarosa, more human. In *The*

Wizard of London, Lackey emphasised the evil qualities of her Snow Queen character, Lady Cordelia, making her a stereotypical female villain, a witch figure. Block, in “Ice”, portrayed the Snow Queen very similarly to Andersen, as a mysterious, enigmatic presence. The Snow Queen herself, in Andersen’s story, is a curiously ambiguous figure. She is neither truly good nor evil. Most fairy tales firmly place their characters within this dichotomy of good and evil, however, the Snow Queen is positioned as “neutral”. She is neither the traditional “witch” of fairy story mythology nor a heroine. This makes the Snow Queen figure an ideal metaphor for the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, an entity that is after all an organisation, not an individual, and thus not able to be characterised as “evil” or “good”.

Inspired by themes

The fantastic

“Cold Vision” makes use of the device of an unreliable narrator, Evon, to instill a sense of the fantastic and the magical. Evon’s childhood belief that she can bring dream objects back from her dreams and the belief that she can alter reality with her dreams is a theme in the novel that evokes a fairy tale feel. This is contrasted with the naturalistic elements that constitute the compliance scenes, and the well-established location of the story in both time and place.

As “Cold Vision” is a mainstream contemporary adaptation of a fairy tale rather than a speculative fiction piece, it is essential that the reader is able to accept the narrative as naturalistic. The reader must be able to accept any magical elements

without experiencing any dissonance. Anne Wilson refers to this lack of dissonance as “magical thought”. Magical thought is the level of thought that we all engage in when we are not making the effort to think rationally and imaginatively to deal effectively with the external world. It is effortless, spontaneous and solipsistic, wholly free from the laws and realities of the external world (139). Thus, in “Cold Vision”, I make liberal use of metaphor, unreliable narration and so on, to bridge the gap between the magical and the naturalistic elements in the story.

The magical fairy tale element of “Cold Vision” is present in the imagined inner world of the protagonist. The novel features several flashbacks where Evon, as a child, brings objects back from her dreams. These surreal dream sequences are juxtaposed against documentary style descriptions of compliance operations, interviews and removals. This juxtaposition of the fantastic and the *alltag* is characteristic of fairy tales and of modern retellings of fairy tales. There is an intrinsic tension between the desire for truth and the element of the fantastic in fairy tales. This interweaving of the fantastic and the “natural” is a characteristic feature of fairy tales (Wieland 8) and is essential to the structure of “Cold Vision”.

Like Block’s story, “Ice”, my novel originally had a fairly strong magical realist element. For example, in the first draft, the adult Evon believed that she was able to bring back objects from her dreams. This theme is eliminated in the final draft, where only the child Evon believes that this is possible. In the previous chapter, I listed the five characteristics of magical realism that Faris proposed. “Cold Vision” has at least three of these characteristics. Firstly, the text has an element of magic

as demonstrated by the child, Evon, who believes she has special powers and that her dreams influence reality. Secondly, the reader does experience doubts in an effort to reconcile contradictory understandings of events. The reader is not sure as to whether or not the child, Evon, can actually manifest dream objects. Thirdly, the narrative juxtaposes two realms, that of dreams and that of reality.

Magical realism has always had a focus on dreams and on the imagined. Kafka's writing exemplifies this approach and has been a major influence on my own work. In particular, *The Trial*, a novel that blends fantasy and realism, has influenced "Cold Vision". Not only because of its otherworldly and surreal ambience but because it concerns itself with social inequity, injustice, alienation and bureaucratic ineptitude. "Cold Vision" explores these issues through a dreamlike lens or framework of the fantastic, but achieves this through the adoption of an underlying fairy tale framework. Evon, with her fantastic childhood beliefs, acts as a bridge between the realistic world of immigration compliance and the fairy tale world of imagination. This construct can be problematic as the two "worlds" are conceptually opposed. "Cold Vision" attempts to juxtapose documentary and dreams while allowing the effortless suspension of disbelief on the part of the reader. As a child, Evon, believes in her ability to bring "dream objects" into the real world.

As an adult, however, Evon, remembers her childhood belief with a mixture of nostalgia, fear and contempt:

When she was a child, she had believed that her dreams could manifest in reality. How many of them had dreamed of a black and white landscape, a world as monochrome as the surface of the moon, but filled with red and orange flowers, and awoken to find a single glowing fiery amber petal on their bedside table? (175)

It requires less suspension of disbelief on the part of the reader to accept that a child would believe such a fantastic concept than an adult. This suspension of disbelief is essential in a story that is based on a fairy tale, and indeed, is essential in fairy tales themselves. As Cristina Bacchilega writes: "The fairy tale's magic depends on our suspension of disbelief" (28). Form-wise, the reader is left uncertain as to what elements of the "Cold Vision" are "real" and which elements are part of the "dreaming" of the protagonist. At the outset of the novel, the narrative is presented as purely realistic. The reader is taken through a day in the life of an immigration compliance officer. As the narrative unfolds, however, the reader becomes increasingly aware that the protagonist's world-view is not as realistic as it initially appears. Thus, the novel seeks to address the concept that illusions about the everyday blind the perceiver, rendering him or her incapable of addressing injustice and malpractice. Evon's perspective, her vision, is shown to be distorted. At some level she truly believes that as a child she could translate objects from the imagined landscape of her dreams into the everyday landscape of her life. This belief taints her perceptions of reality, deforming her vision and impeding her ability to engage with the people around her. Her inability to discern

the difference between dreams and reality has distanced her from her family, from her colleagues and from her own emotions. Her life is as hollow and lacking in substance as a dream.

Zipes writes of the literary fairy tale that its narrative is defined by “the sense of wondrous change” (Oxford Companion xviii). He is referring, in particular, to a process of transformation that is undergone by the protagonist in most fairy tales, for example, Cinderella becomes a princess, or in “Cold Vision”, Evon regains her humanity and compassion. This idea is expressed in “Cold Vision” through the metaphor of the dream where Evon’s dreams not only have the power to change reality but are also mutable and transformative in themselves. In “Cold Vision” Evon’s dreams are analogous to the creative process with some ideas (dreams) manifesting as works of art, other ideas being forgotten, some ideas being made into failed works of art and others being realised exactly as they were originally imagined.

By now she had invented a nomenclature and simple rules for her dreaming. There were the dreams that produced concrete objects that endured—solidus dreams. There were dreams that produced objects that faded away—fader dreams. There were dreams that produced dream objects that were different, yet related to, the object dreamed about—mutoid dreams. There were dreams that produced dream objects that were the same as the object dreamed about—exacto dreams. Mutoid dream objects tended to be solidus. Exacto dream objects tended to be faders. (298)

Bell, as the “Gerda” character, embodies the themes of art and creativity. He is shown to be creative in the way he dresses: “Evon glanced at Bell. He was wearing

a purple suit, pointy shoes and a violet tie with a silver tie clip in the shape of a rose" (150). He is also shown to be a poet who enjoys writing haikus. Evon, in contrast, suppresses her own creativity, insisting on a rational approach. When she is in hospital, she receives a basket of flowers from her work colleagues.

There was a card in the basket of flowers. She pulled it out
and opened it up: Hi Evon. A haiku to make you feel better.
Love from Daniel, Frederick and Willy:

Flames strike sudden blow
You embrace dark shadows
And wake to flowers

Bell had drawn a smiley face under the haiku. It didn't make
her feel any better. Poetry just hurt her head. And smiley
faces made her want to puke. (214)

Thus, Evon rejects creativity and art as it reminds her of the dreams that haunted her childhood.

Dreams play a vital role in "Cold Vision" and are a major motif throughout the narrative. Later, we find that Evon believed that one of her dreams caused her father to leave her mother, and that she believed that another dream caused her mother to die from cancer. As an adult, she no longer consciously believes that her dreams have power over the real world, however, the topic of dreaming is still one that makes her uneasy and causes her psychological distress. As a woman, she is dedicated to the idea of becoming purely logical and rational, cold and unemotional and controlled. The fact that her childhood self had such illogical beliefs makes her doubt the purity of her devotion to a rational life. The way that Evon has come to

terms with her guilt surrounding her father's abandonment and her mother's death is by rejecting anything that appears to her to be irrational, including emotionality, dreams, imagination and humanity. At heart, Evon is deeply afraid that dreams have power and that if she lets herself dream or feel that she will lose everything and be alone. However, she fails to realise that by cutting herself off from dreams and feeling she has already lost everything that matters to her. While Evon can appear to control her feelings, she cannot control her dreams. Evon's dreams disturb her as they convey to her messages that she would rather not acknowledge, they are the outlet for her suppressed intuition and feeling. Thus Evon dreams of Rose's death while deporting her. The dream crystallises Evon's suppressed awareness that her actions are cruel and inhumane, and that Rose is despairing enough to commit suicide.

"Cold Vision" posits a state of contradiction between an announced ideal (or dream) and everyday reality, and explores the gap between what is perceived as ideal and what is praxis. It does this using a fairy tale framework. As fairy tales are traditionally tales that combine the real and the unreal elements and that convey a moral message, these functions fit well with my purpose in writing "Cold Vision". Even the setting of the novel, Canberra, a city created from an idea, embodies the novel's motif that translating dreams into the everyday results in compromises that are disappointing and do not meet expectations. Both Sydney and Melbourne contended for the title of Australia's capital. When agreement could not be reached, a site was selected that was roughly half way between the two cities, Canberra. Canberra is a purpose built city, a planned city that while beautiful and

well-designed, has a certain coldness and lack of spontaneity about it. There are very few novels set in Canberra, but other authors who use the cold winter setting of Australia's capital are Marion Halligan in "The Point", a novel set on the shore of Lake Burley Griffin during winter, Dorothy Johnston in her crime fiction and Frank Moorhouse in his recent novel, *Cold Light*, set in the 1950s.

"Cold Vision" portrays Canberra as a failed dream. As I write in "Cold Vision":

They drove past Parliament House. Its massive flag hung in the air, hovering like a magician's cloth. Voila! A rabbit! Canberra was like a dream object. It had been created out of nowhere. A created city based on a dream. It was as if a giant dreamer had awoken to find the city clasped in her fist, a small pointy city as symmetrical and as cold as a snowflake.
(320)

In writing "Cold Vision", incorporating the magical elements into the story presented me with considerable difficulties. The novel is designed on one hand to be heavily realistic; it is based on my actual experiences as an immigration compliance officer. On the other hand, I wanted the story to have a fairy tale feel, an otherworldly ambience that would serve to explicate the tensions between an ideal world where dreams can come true, and a real world, where dreams are destroyed. As I wrote the novel, I became increasingly aware that it was almost impossible to guide the reader smoothly between these two contrasting worlds. Persuading the reader to suspend his or her disbelief when switching between these two views was very challenging. This was a problem that I was unable to solve on my own, and Andersen's tale was of no assistance. In this respect, as a writer, turning to a fairy tale for structural help was not useful. However I was

fortunate enough to receive some advice from a very experienced, published author, Merlinda Bobis. She suggested that there should always be a concrete link that would help the reader transition between scenes, for example, when Evon sees a rainbow coloured hot air balloon overhead, it reminds her of a blow up beach ball she played with as a child (322). Or when Raven gives Evon beads, they remind her of childhood experiences. By adopting this technique, I was able to overcome the problem; literary technique had to be consciously employed as a bridge between the real and the imagined.

Dichotomies

As mentioned in the previous chapter, “The Snow Queen” presents dichotomies; those of feeling/thinking, emotion/rationality, cold/warmth, religion/science. My novel, too, builds on these contrasts, especially that of emotionality versus rationality. I chose “The Snow Queen” as a basis for my novel because I was struck by its contrasts and how they related to the motifs I wanted to explore. The usual interpretation of Andersen’s story is that it is an exploration of reason and intellectual thinking on one side, and feeling and romanticism on the other. The Snow Queen herself is a symbol of cold intellectualism while Gerda represents human feeling and compassion. My novel, too, is about this dichotomy between feeling and thinking, dreaming and reality, ideal and praxis.

The idea of being frozen emotionally as a child is an important theme in “Cold Vision” for Evon is shown to be damaged by her childhood and thus unable to connect with others. Like Kay, she is cynical, rejects sentimentality and emotion,

and seeks to view the world only from a rationalist viewpoint. Her desire to suppress the guilt she feels for the abandonment of her father and the death of her mother have resulted in inability to move on emotionally and enjoy her adulthood as a caring, feeling, compassionate human being. This stasis is shown in dialogue and characterisation, but it is also reflected in the landscape in which the story takes place. I mentioned earlier that Block, Lackey, Byatt and Andersen use landscape to illustrate the contrast between rationality and emotionality. "Cold Vision" doesn't reflect the thinking/feeling dichotomy in its landscape as clearly as these writers, however, the theme can still be found expressed in the landscape and environment of the novel. The story is set in Canberra, for example, a city characterised by many in Australia as being "soulless", "cold" and "artificial". The season in which the story takes place is winter, and winter in Canberra is cold relative to other cities in Australia. "Cold Vision", however, does not attempt to make a strong contrast between the coldness of Canberra in winter and warmer landscapes except in a single scene, a flashback where Evon is with Robert walking in the bush and swimming in a lake. In this scene, it is obviously summer and Evon is shown to display warm feelings towards Robert and a sense of belonging. This scene makes references to flowers, and especially to wattle. I choose to reference wattle, a flower that symbolises Australia, to represent passion, sunshine and warmth, in preference to the roses that feature in "The Snow Queen".

Evon remembers the above occasion as a happier time before she started to work for the department, and muses:

It seemed like she had been a different person when she was first going out with Robert. They'd spent so much time together, just talking, making love. Everything had seemed so alive, so vibrant, so warm. It was as if everything had been bathed in a golden light and that it was always summer. (233)

In Andersen's story, the Snow Queen kisses Kay twice. These kisses, as well as the shards of mirror, herald his transition from the world of feeling to the world of thinking. The first kiss numbs him to the cold and the second kiss makes him forget Gerda and his family. The Snow Queen states that she cannot kiss him a third time because that would kill him. This idea is paralleled in "Cold Vision". Evon's first kiss from the Snow Queen comes when her father leaves—this makes her icy and impervious to the cold. The second metaphorical kiss is her commencement of employment as a compliance officer—in a sense, she begins to forget about her family, both her mother/father and her husband/child, that is, they become less important to her. Unlike Kay, whose rescue is purely enacted by Gerda, Evon is rescued by a number of experiences. I chose to adopt the idea that each kiss had to be "undone" in some way. Therefore, Raven helps Evon on her journey back to humanity by reawakening her memories of her family—he undoes the effects of the second kiss. Bell succeeds in undoing the effects of the first kiss when he kisses Evon, making her realise that she is lovable.

The themes of the familiar and the foreign are also explored in Andersen's tale and in "Cold Vision". The ideas of abduction and exile are strongly linked to the idea of the "other" and these ideas are important to understanding "Cold Vision". In my novel the concept of exile/abduction is expressed in immigration terminology as involuntary removal, commonly known as deportation. In Andersen's tale, the Snow Queen is clearly a form of "bogey man" or abductor. She is responsible for transporting people from the warmth to the cold, from the familiar to the foreign, from the desired location to the undesired location. In my novel, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship and the compliance officers are also bogey men—they steal people away, adults and children, lock them up and exile them. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship, too, for unlawful non-citizens or those in breach of their visa conditions, embodies fear of the unknown, of being separated from loved ones and from a desirable location. In "Cold Vision", unlawful non-citizens show a visceral fear of the representatives of the department. They are afraid that they or their children might be stolen away from them. While we do not know why the Snow Queen steals away children, we do know why the Department of Immigration and Citizenship claims to have the right to take away unlawful non-citizens; it is enforcing immigration law. However, we do not know if these laws are justified or why it is necessary to remove people from their lives, their families and their friends. The idea of the Snow Queen as an abductor or a bogeyman is mirrored in "Cold vision" where Evon describes how she became a compliance officer despite her request for a different position. Like Kay, Evon is seduced by the bogeyman; she is taken away by Steph and made a compliance

officer against her will. She is forced to choose between her home life and work life, between the domestic realm and the foreign.

Thus “Cold Vision” focuses on the dichotomies of home/exile and thinking/feeling that are found within “The Snow Queen”. In drawing on these themes, I attempted to use Andersen’s framework to expose injustices within Australia’s immigration policy, that is, as a way of subverting the status quo.

Inspired by symbols

Snow

As I mentioned when discussing the dichotomy of thinking/feeling in relation to the landscape, “Cold Vision” has a cold setting. However, unlike Andersen’s tale, it is not set in a European winter but in an Australian one. The setting is Canberra, the coldest capital city in Australia, and the landscape is described in terms of ice, frost, biting winds and clear cold winter skies, for example:

It was a frosty morning and the trees, which only last year had been flaming like torches in the bushfires, were glazed with ice. The sun was low in the sky and cast a pale apricot light over the landscape, gilding the frost. (296)

Thus “Cold Vision” references and makes use of the symbolism of ice, snow and cold. As mentioned earlier, ice and snow are commonly used to represent a number of concepts, including the idea of purity, innocence and stasis. They are used in this context in “The Snow Queen” but also convey the idea of frozen, unexpressed emotions. This is the meaning that “Cold Vision” seeks to emphasise.

The theme of snow and ice in "Cold Vision" is primarily used to symbolise the lack of affect of the protagonist, Evon, who, like Kay, is emotionally frozen. Unable to cope with childhood guilt around the abandonment of her father and the death of her mother, she has retreated to an inner world. Evon's inner landscape is that of winter, of glaciers and sparkling white snow drifts. The symbols of ice and snow are used to represent her psychological and emotional paralysis. The emphasis of the story is on Evon's frozen inner world and distorted inner processes and this is another reason why a fairy tale structure works well for "Cold Vision". As Bettelheim writes:

The unrealistic nature of these tales (which narrow-minded rationalists object to) is an important device, because it makes obvious that the fairy tales' concern is not useful information about the external world, but the inner processes taking place in an individual. (25)

Like Kay, Evon experiences a kind of emotional alienation from others, from her family, colleagues and society. She has sealed herself away from human contact, retreating into an inner ice palace. The moment when Evon finally finds her humanity, and when her inner ice melts, is when she grants Raven a temporary bridging visa that lasts one hundred years, effectively "eternity" in human terms. Her decision to show compassion to Raven is part of the journey towards humanity that she undertakes with Bell's support. Other steps are her encouraging Mrs Parker to go to the press to tell them about her plight, and considering letting Rose

escape from custody. The final step on her pathway to humanity is when she decides to let her family back into her life.

Mirrors

The mirror in "Cold Vision" is not explicitly present as a concrete object and is never referenced as such. It is a metaphorical construct implicit in Evon's distorted vision and present in its broken form in the shards of ice and glass that haunt Evon's dreams. The mirror is present in Evon's gaze, making beautiful objects (or indeed any objects) look hideously ugly. Evon, too, sees the world as an ugly, distorted place. Ultimately, portraying this negative world-view from a very deep and intimate exclusively third person view point is problematic. There is a risk that readers may feel alienated from Evon and hostile towards her. Other writers, for example Block, have avoided this problem by using sympathetic characters as the exclusive point-of-view character. The mirror in "Cold Vision" exists chiefly in the form of Evon's distorted vision, in her negativity and her inability to discern that her actions are immoral. The mirror also exists in Evon's dreams of standing in an office littered with broken glass from a shattered window. In "Cold Vision", it is she who is injured by (metaphorical) shards of glass from the mirror.

In "Cold Vision", when the mirror breaks, as symbolised by Evon's dream of standing in an office filled with glass, Evon's true vision returns to her. She understands that she has been blind to humanity, emotion and compassion. This is when she rejects Bell's offer to run away with him to Africa and decides to stay in Australia and commit herself to her husband and child. The metaphorical breaking of the mirror is referenced twice in "Cold Vision". The first mention occurs near the

beginning of the novel, similar to Andersen's story. The second mention represents Evon's realisation that there is more to life than rationality, work and compliance. The shattering of the office window signifies that the mirror that distorted her vision and froze her heart is broken and that she is free.

She'd imagined that the window had shattered, that glass had floated through the air, very slowly, spinning and tumbling as if suspended in zero gee. (434)

This approach is markedly different to that found in "The Snow Queen", where the breaking of the mirror signals the onset of Kay's trials and tribulations and the reassembly of the mirror (or at least, a part thereof) signifies his release. In "The Snow Queen", Kay is blinded to beauty and to love by a shard of glass in his heart and a shard of glass in his eye. Evon, too, is damaged by two traumatic events in her life. The first is when her father leaves and she discovers that he was not her biological father. This is when she becomes "blinded" by the first shard of the mirror. The second event is when her mother dies of cancer. This is the second shard of the mirror that freezes her heart and stops her from feeling anything

A further aspect of the mirror that I would like to touch on briefly is that of its function of providing a lens that can be used to critique. The mirror can be used to examine the world, natural or otherwise, with a view to finding fault. It is a distorting mirror but one that seeks fault rather than creating it. As a writer, I associate this function of the mirror with the creative process. An important theme in "Cold Vision" is the gulf between that which the artist imagines and that which the artist creates.

To use the mirror as a metaphor, there is a gap between what actually is before the mirror and what is seen in the reflection. The reflection can be seen as being the “dream” or the “inspiration”, and the object can be seen as being the creation itself, be it a novel, a sculpture, a painting or any other work of art.

As a writer, all too often, the idea appears to be perfect (like Andersen’s perfect rose), but the realisation of the idea is flawed. For example, while I conceived “Cold Vision” to be a feminist tale about a strong, competent woman, an examination of the novel using a “mirror” results in all the flaws in my conception becoming evident, and perhaps revealing something not only about the work but about the writer. That is, beneath the surface, “Cold Vision” does not tell a feminist tale. Rather, it can be read as the story of a woman whose masculine traits and occupation are detrimental to her wellbeing. Her redemption involves embracing the feminine domain of family, emotion and domesticity. Thus, in Bernheimer’s words: “Like mirrors, fairy tales are suggestive openings into the self—never final answers, but only reflections” (xxx).

The idea that the mirror distorts the self as well as others is an interpretation found in “Cold Vision”. Evon blames herself for her father’s abandonment and her mother’s death. Filled with fear and guilt, she has turned away from humanity, isolating herself in a metaphorical palace of ice. The mirror has not only distorted her vision of others, but also her vision of herself. The mirror provokes loathing of others and also self-loathing—this is a theme that has not been sufficiently explored by other commentators who have examined “The Snow Queen”. An

exception is Ellen Brown; writing from a feminist perspective about the mirror in "The Snow Queen", she explains what she believes she learnt from it as a young child: "That mirrors are evil—we shouldn't look too closely at ourselves" (5). Clearly, from this, Brown sees the mirror in "The Snow Queen" as being used to observe the faults and flaws not only of others but also of the self. However, in "Cold Vision", the protagonist is modelled more closely on Kay from Andersen's tale. She does not look into the mirror and see herself. She remains blind to her own flaws until she is saved by the more benevolent gaze of another person, Bell.

Conclusion

Contemporary women writers, including myself, continue to find inspiration in the fairy tale, drawing on its form, themes, characters, symbolism and motifs to tell new stories. Fairy tales continue to shape and influence contemporary writing, and “The Snow Queen” with its focus on strong female characters, its evocative aesthetics and symbolism has provided inspiration for a diverse range of women writers across a broad range of genres.

Fairy tales have been subject to a great deal of examination with theorists arguing that fairy tales have many purposes, including preserving gender roles and class structures, controlling behaviour and transmitting cultural heritage. Literary approaches to the fairy tale have been diverse, ranging from the folklorist approach, the structuralist approach, the literary approach, the psychoanalytic approach, the historicist, sociological, and ideological approaches to the feminist approach. However, none of these approaches have attempted to categorise the ways that modern women writers have employed tales as a framework for their fiction. I argue that writers turn to the fairy tale for three broad purposes. Firstly, fairy tales are used normatively, as a means of providing a structure that preserves traditional values, roles and politics (supporting the status quo). Secondly, fairy tales are used to provide a structure that subverts and challenges ideas and assumptions around traditional values, usually associated with gender (subverting the status quo). And, thirdly, fairy tales are used as a structural formula, framework or technical tool to enhance characterisation, mood, atmosphere and meaning. Fairy tales can be employed in new fiction for either subversive or normative

purposes, but either purpose is always underpinned and enhanced by an aesthetic and symbolic structure that adds weight and meaning to the narrative.

Contemporary fiction that draws upon fairy tale structure is able to be informed and enhanced by the reader's awareness (whether conscious or not) of the underlying forms and patterns of fairy tale narrative.

The first two purposes can be examined using gender as a lens for analysis. Many feminist writers have been inspired by the fairy tale to write stories that examine, subvert and challenge gender inequality. These writers, for instance, Byatt, tend to use the fairy tale framework to subvert traditional ideas and assumptions around femininity. However, it is not generally understood that some women use the fairy tale framework to support traditional ideas around femininity and some writers, for instance, Lackey, use the fairy tale framework for this purpose. Women writers often employ the fairy tale framework, in order to structure their writing, add mood and atmosphere, and to access the reader's awareness of the original text. These writers use fairy tales as a structural device, as a way to explore gender, as a way to draw upon the reader's own awareness of fairy tale symbolism, and as a way of imbuing their texts with the childlike wonder that is inspired by fairy tales.

Whether women writers turn to fairy tales to subvert traditional values, to support traditional values or as structural enhancement, they nevertheless remain enchanted by them.

Cold Vision

A novel by Sara Lyons

Chapter one

Evon moved the sheets aside with a gloved hand. There was nothing under the bed linen. Nothing under the pillow. Nothing under the rumpled towel. The room smelled musty. She didn't like to think about what else it smelled of.

A middle-aged man sat on a white fluffy stool with spindly gilt legs. He wore a suit that he must have purchased at least ten years ago; a grey double-breasted jacket, shiny around the lapels, and a pair of trousers with turned-up cuffs. His brown leather shoes were scuffed.

"You can go if you like, sir," she said. "You don't have to stay on our account. We're only interested in non-citizens." She pulled open the drawer in the bedside table. It was lighter than she expected and came off its runners. "Lord!" She joggled it back into position and glanced at the contents. The usual items. Condoms. Gel. Tissues. The essentials.

"What're you looking for?" The man examined a gold ring on his pinkie finger. The ring featured a huge rhinestone that sparkled in the low light.

Evon pushed her fringe back from her face with her forearm, trying not to

touch her hair with her gloved hands. "I recommend you leave. This will take some time."

His fingers fiddled with his tie, tightening up the knot. "Why can't you just leave people alone?"

"If people had the appropriate visas, I would leave them alone." There was nothing to find. The room was tiny and had hardly anything in it. Just the fluffy stool, the bed, the bedside table. Piles of towels.

"What appropriate visa would that be?" The man laughed. He was missing an eye tooth. Evon had noticed that if a person was missing a tooth, it was almost always the eye tooth. Presumably, if they lost a front tooth, they would replace it. Maybe they thought a missing eye tooth wasn't very noticeable and so didn't bother with cosmetic work. "The whore visa?"

"We're not particular," Evon said. "Any visa with permission to work associated with it will do." She pushed open the door to the bathroom and went in. She checked the obvious places: under the edge of the vanity unit, behind the mirror, medicine cabinet, behind the toilet. She unzipped a make-up bag decorated with smiley faces and found a Malaysian passport. The bio page showed an attractive girl with dark eyes and a whimsical twist to the corner of her mouth. The passport contained a student visa with permission to work. The conditions allowed twenty hours of work per week during semester and full-time work during the holiday breaks.

Evon went back into the bedroom and was struck anew by the aroma of the place. It smelt dark and earthy with an overlay of floral air freshener. She glanced

at the man. "You still here, sir?"

I'm staying til I get what I came for." He folded his arms across his chest.
"I've already paid."

"Okay. If that's what you want."

Evon had worked in the public service for ten years since graduating from the Australian National University with a Bachelor of Arts with majors in history and politics. She'd spent her time on the front counter, served two excruciating years in human resources, processed business visas for a hectic period of twelve months, and was now working in the compliance section. Being a compliance officer was considered glamorous. It was the 'sexy' face of immigration. Whenever a vacancy came up large numbers of immigration employees applied, all eager for the opportunity to flash a gold badge, clamber over fences, chase after duds, rummage through brothels, gatecrash Indian restaurants and knock on doors while shouting "Immigration! Open up!"

Evon had not applied to work in compliance. In fact, she had clearly written on her performance agreement that she did not want to work in the area. Naturally, this had resulted in her immediate placement as a compliance officer. She had thought of complaining, or even refusing but had lacked the will. Later, she'd spoken to Steph, the compliance manager, about her reservations, but Steph had smoothly persuaded her that it would be a good career move and that she should give it a try. It seemed easier to just agree than to fight the decision. Besides, Steph, with her "corporate" Goth black skirt, fishnets and stilettos was difficult to argue with and quite intimidating. She was a tall woman, just under 180 cm and

had the widest roundest hips and backside that Evon had ever seen. Her nickname in the office was the "Gothopotamus".

"You going to be much longer?" The man pressed a button on his watch, illuminating the dial. A wash of light threw his skin into harsh relief, turning each pore into a pothole and transforming his nostrils into hairy caverns. "I have to get home. My wife's expecting me. We're having chops for dinner."

The door opened, revealing Daniel Bell. He was young for a team leader, only twenty nine. His face had an innocent soft look that six years in compliance had failed to erase. His long curly hair was tied back in a scrunchie and today he was wearing small round glasses. This was despite having perfect vision.

Evon gave the passport to him. "You can return it to her. She's okay to work. Not a dud. Not in breach."

"Excellent. Glad to hear it." Bell flicked through the passport. The glasses obviously impeded his vision so he tucked them into his breast pocket. "Great work. I'm glad she's in the clear." Bell always had sympathy for clients. Evon didn't know whether to admire that trait or have contempt for it.

"Did we locate anyone?" Evon asked. They needed at least another ten locations this month or Steph would spit the dummy.

"Willy's interviewing one of the girls. She's claiming that she wasn't working here. She just dropped in to say hello to a friend of hers and maybe play a game of cards." He raised an eyebrow. "She was strangely dressed for it."

"What was she wearing?"

"Mostly naked but equipped with boots and a whip. She was on her way to a

fancy dress party. She was with a man who was wearing manacles and a nappy."

"Right."

"She's the girl who fits the description. The overstayer."

"The African?"

"That's the one. Do you want to interview her? I don't feel that Willy's got the experience, yet."

"Sure." She headed to the front room. "I hope you've taken the whip off her."

When Evon entered the front room, she found Officer Willy Rhodes chatting with the madam, a middle-aged woman who looked as if she had been transported forward in time from the 1970s. She wore a flowing kaftan with a big pattern of orange, yellow and red swirls. Quite fashionable, really, in a retro way. Willy was apologising for disrupting her business. He was supposed to be the note taker but he did not have his note book or a pen in hand.

Bell stood to the side, thumbing an SMS into his mobile. Evon realised that despite his air of distraction, he knew what was going on around him. He was the best multi-tasker she'd ever met.

Evon quickly spotted the African woman. She had lit a cigarette and was blowing smoke rings. She wore black lipstick, had long black hair and wore a small amount of tight black leather. Her skin was a deep, deep brown and her eyes gleamed with sharp intelligence. Evon could see that she was a woman to keep an eye on. The expression on her face was mean but her body language showed that

she was not about to put up a fight. "My name's Evon Carr. I'm a compliance officer with the Department of Immigration. She pointed at her badge which was in her belt. The woman didn't bother to look at it. "What's your name?"

"Rose."

All the girls in this brothel had flower names. "Not your working name. Your real name." A fan whirled overhead. A red ribbon hung from it and inscribed furious circles in the air, a constant distraction.

"Rose."

"That's not your name."

"It is."

"What's your birth date?" Evon gestured to Willy. "Please, get your note book out. You're supposed to be recording this."

Willy looked startled. "Oh, okay. Sorry. I forgot. Of course, I should. I'm on to it. Oops." He fumbled around for his note book, eventually found it in his bum-bag.

"Can I borrow a pen?"

Evon took her pen out her pocket and tossed it at him like a spear. He dropped it. "Don't forget to give it back," she said.

"I won't."

"So, what visa are you on?"

The girl glanced at a big louvred cupboard. A calendar, two years out of date, hung there. It had colourful hot air balloons floating over Canberra at sunrise.

"Resident here."

"For how long?"

"A long time." She had a smooth, educated voice. Very controlled.

"When did you last enter Australia?"

She blew another smoke ring. It drifted towards Evon, shining like ectoplasm. "Oh, I forget now. Long time."

"How did you get PR?" Evon's hair was irritating her. It had broken free from her pony tail and the wind from the fan was making it lash her face.

"I came on a business visa. Oh, maybe a spouse visa. Oh, hang on. A student visa. I'm not really sure now."

"Where's your passport, Rose?" Evon pronounced the name with a sarcastic inflection.

"I lost it. It was stolen."

Evon let her face show scepticism. "So, did you report it to the police? What police station? Have you got a report number?"

"No. I didn't tell them. Why would I? They're never interested in such matters." She took the cigarette out her mouth and looked at the black lipstick ring on its filter with a frown.

Evon glanced at Bell who rolled his eyes. He tapped his watchless wrist.

"Where was it when it was stolen? When?"

"I don't know. I forget." She stubbed out her cigarette, grinding it hard into a saucer. The ash stood out starkly, very black, against the white china. "No idea."

"Who took it?"

The woman just shrugged. "Maybe another girl. One who doesn't have a visa."

"Do you have any other ID?"

"No. Nothing." She patted her bare thighs. "No pockets here."

"I can see that."

Willy sniggered, and Evon glared at him.

"Driver's licence?"

"No."

"Student card?"

"No." She was telling Evon the standard lies. The lies Evon had heard over and over ever since she had started this job two years ago. "No. Nothing. No ID."

"Do you have any document at all with your name on it? A letter? Birthday card? Anything!"

"No, everything is lost."

"What job do you do here?"

"I don't work here. Why would I? I'm an educated woman. I have a Masters degree. I just come here sometimes to visit friends. Play cards. Talk. I'm a respectable girl." She smiled, showing perfect white teeth. "I wouldn't do this kind of work."

"So, where do you live?"

"Oh, I stay with friends. I have lots of friends. They look after me. What

about you? Do you have lots of friends?"

"This is your last chance," Evon said. "After this, things will start to get messy. What's your real name?"

The girl shook her head. "I have already told you."

"When did you arrive in Australia?"

"Don't remember."

"What year?"

"Five years ago, maybe."

"What month?"

"I don't remember now."

"Very well." Evon put her hand on the woman's shoulder. "I find that I have reasonable suspicion that you are an unlawful non-citizen. Therefore, I am detaining you under Section 189 of the Migration Act. You are not free to leave. I'm going to take you to the ACT Detention Centre where you will remain until such time as you leave Australia or are granted a visa. Do you have any questions?"

The woman shook her head.

"You have the right to contact a migration agent or lawyer, your consulate or embassy or an interpreter. Would you like to do that?"

The woman shrugged.

"Do you have any medical conditions?"

No reply.

"Stand up, please."

The woman did so, very slowly uncrossing her legs and slinking to her feet. Every motion portrayed control and self-confidence.

"I will now search you. The reason we do this is to ensure that you do not have any weapons or other items that might cause harm either to yourself or to others and to ensure that you have nothing in your possession that would assist you to escape our custody." Evon gave her a pat down search. She wasn't wearing enough to conceal anything. Willy's eyes looked shiny and he was refusing to meet Evon's eye. Was he about to cry? He was new and temperamentally unsuited to compliance work. He was soft and too easily scared. Nervous types rarely lasted long in this job.

For the third time, the woman glanced at the cupboard.

"Officer Rhodes, have you searched this place properly?" Evon asked.

"Of course, I have. Obviously!"

Bell slipped his phone into his pocket and stared at Rhodes. "This room?"

"Well, yes, but there's no need. We're in here. We can see everything."

Evon walked over to the cupboard, flung the door open and stepped back.

A man exploded out into the room. He was heavily built with broad shoulders. His skin was a deep ebony and his head was alive with long dreadlocks. Bell and Willy threw themselves at him and knocked him to the ground. As he struggled his dreadlocks writhed with the energy of Medusa's snakes. Tiny colourful beads woven into his hair clinked and pinged against each other as he

fought against Bell and Willy. Finally, Bell wrestled a pair of handcuffs onto his wrists. They hauled the man to his feet and Bell shut the cupboard door with a savage kick that broke the louvres. Evon was surprised. It was unlike Bell to perform acts of needless violence.

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Willy examined his hands. His fingers were shaking. "One way trip back to Africa. Shame she can't stay, especially with her looks!"

"Why? Do you think she'd like to date you?" Evon said. It was hard to imagine that Rose would be attracted to a fortyish, short guy with thinning blonde curly hair and bulging blue eyes. Especially when she found out what an APS 4 was paid.

Rose was sitting in the back of the transit van. No handcuffs seeing as she was a girl and was being compliant. The man, though, was still handcuffed and wasn't compliant. He was banging his head against the window. Evon hoped he wouldn't manage to break free. That had happened once in the Sydney office. The man had died when he hit the road.

Bell was driving, Willy sat in the middle and Evon sat near the window. Willy's thigh pressed against Evon's causing her considerable irritation. "She has no right to be here," Evon said. "She has her own country. You saw her file. She's a dud."

Bell frowned. "Don't call her that. She's a person."

"What?" Evon knew what Bell meant. He didn't like it if the team used slang terms for clients. "All right. She's an UNC."

"Next you'll be saying she takes jobs off Australians," Willy said.

"Well, she is." There was a long silence. Evon thought of all the sex workers unable to get a job because of people like Rose. Tragic!

Bell straightened up. "You don't know how a girl like that came to be working in the sex industry. She could have been trafficked. She could be desperate to earn money for a sick brother or sister."

Evon imagined him mounting a white horse and galloping off to find a dragon to slay. She shook her head and muttered: "Sir Bell to the rescue!"

"You know," Willy said, after a long pause. Evon had already noted that he didn't like silences and would fill them with any babble that came to mind. "As far as I'm concerned, people don't have faces. There's like a blank disc, a blur like a pinkish thumbprint where other people see —"

Evon turned up the radio but Bell turned it down again.

"I suffer from prosopagnosia." His expression suggested that he was preparing for a long explanation. An explanation that did not interest Evon.

"Then you're in the wrong job," Evon said.

"You know what it is?"

"Face blindness."

"It won't affect my work."

"Of course it will." Evon watched the duds in the mirror. She saw Rose put

an arm around the man's shoulders. He leant his head against her and stopped struggling. Interesting.

"You've got a nerve. Haven't you heard of the code of conduct? The Australian Public Service Values. Diversity? Fair play? You're trying to discriminate against me."

"Haven't you heard of reality? You need to be able to recognise people in this job. What do you think will happen if you lock up the wrong person? An Australian citizen or someone who has permanent residence."

"I'll err on the side of caution."

"Well, that's not really very reassuring. Does that mean you won't detain anyone?"

"That's not what I mean," Willy said. "I mean, I'll be careful, thorough."

"You're a dumb arse."

"That's it. You're harassing me. When we get back to the office, I'm telling Steph that you're bullying me."

Bell shook his head. "You can't. What's said in the car, remains in the car. It's one of our basic rules. Now, Evon, shut up and behave!"

"Oh, all right." She'd had her fun. "I'm sorry, Will." On the radio, Evanescence was singing: *My Immortal*. Evon liked the song. It wasn't too cheerful.

Bell turned on his indicator and changed lanes. "Willy, once you get used to Evon, you'll love her. She's a real softy underneath that cold exterior. Now what

were you saying about face blindness?"

"I've learnt to recognise people in other ways, by their hairstyles or voices. The jewellery they wear. Their clothes. Did you realise that most people only have a half dozen or so outfits they wear to work?"

"So, how do you recognise me? I have hundreds of outfits." Bell was composing an SMS as he drove. It seemed like Bell had crowds of friends and acquaintances, all of whom constantly texted him.

"Easy. You're the only bloke with long hair." Willy grinned. "And you have great fashion sense. I love that tie."

Evon glanced at Bell. He was wearing a purple suit, pointy shoes and a violet tie with a silver tie clip in the shape of a rose. "I think it's because he's gay."

"I'm not gay, I'm just trendy." He glanced up at the road and then went back to his mobile. "Not that there's anything wrong with being gay."

Evon snorted. "Right. You're not straight!" She raised an eyebrow. "Are you?"

"I'm completely straight. Why do you think all these girls are constantly texting me." Bell sent his SMS and slid his phone into his pocket. "So, Willy, how do you recognise Evon?"

"A number of factors. Her long black hair. She's quite skinny. She likes to wear white. But mostly, her voice. She always sounds like an angry snobby bitch."

"I resent the 'snob' comment. I'm not snobbish at all." They were passing Parliament House. Its lights shone a yellowish green like the innards of a squashed

bug. "And if I sound angry all the time, it's probably because you're always annoying me. It's not your fault, but you're quite irritating."

"Why?" Willy sounded like he was about to burst into tears but that didn't put Evon off.

"It's nothing personal, but incompetence annoys me."

"Evon!" Bell said. "Be nice! You're not playing well with your friends."

"He's not my friend," Evon said. "I deliberately don't have any friends. They just get in the way."

"That's right, we're not friends," Willy said. "And, I'm not incompetent. What do you mean by that? I can't believe you said I'm incompetent. Give me one example!"

"Did you or did you not lock yourself in the van with a detainee, leaving the engine running, last week?"

"It wasn't my fault! I've only been in compliance a month. No one told me the van door couldn't be opened from the inside."

"So, what do you think stops the duds ... sorry ... 'Unlawful Non-Citizens' from jumping out the van?"

"I dunno. I just —"

"What about writing your shopping list in your official notebook?"

"I didn't realise —"

"What about handcuffing yourself to your briefcase and losing the key?"

"I haven't even done the basic training modules yet."

"I'll tell you right now, there's nothing in the modules that will teach you common sense."

Bell banged a fist onto the dashboard. "Enough! We all make mistakes. He's new. Now be quiet. Behave for once. Why do you have to be so hostile all the time? Just chill out. You're annoying me with this stupid bickering."

Evon glared at Willy who quickly looked away. "She's just a bitch," he muttered.

"Blah, blah, blah," Evon said, in lieu of shouting abuse at him. She felt like smacking him around the head. He was the most annoying person she'd ever worked with. Once, when she was a child, she'd had a dream where she'd been shouting at someone. She didn't know who. Perhaps a woman. Evon had been filled with hatred. It had been terrifying and uncontrollable, sweeping through her like a liquid fire. When she'd woken, though, she'd found a stone under her pillow. A black and glassy stone. Vicious and oily.

Bell glanced at his mobile to see what the time was. "We'll VIN them both tomorrow morning. It's getting too late to do it now. Evon, you can be the male's case officer. Willy, you can take the girl."

Willy cleared his throat. "I'm not sure I'm ready for that yet, Bell. I'm on a steep learning curve here." He glared at Evon, presumably daring her to say anything.

"Well, you have to start some time, Willy." Bell looked at Evon.

"Yes, but to handle a whole case from start to finish. I'm not sure I can do it. I haven't even done the case management module at National Office, yet."

"Fine," Evon said. "How about, you VIN her, and I'll take the case after that?" She couldn't stand to see Willy stuff up yet another compliance task.

"How do you feel about that, Willy," Bell asked.

"Good! That's great." Willy glared at Evon. It was obvious he wasn't exactly grateful.

"Okay, VIN them in the morning then," Bell said.

"The regulations say they should be VINed as soon as reasonably practicable," Evon said. "As far as I'm concerned that means tonight." The VINs, or "Very Important Notices" consisted of twelve pages of unintelligible advice that had to be given to clients upon detention.

"It's nearly eleven. You won't finish until three am. Especially if you have to use an interpreter. Do it tomorrow. You're too tired. And they're too tired."

"I'm not tired."

"I'm telling you, Evon, to do it tomorrow," Bell said. "Understand?"

Evon crossed her arms and stared out the passenger side window.

"Understand?" Bell said.

"Yes, sir."

Willy sniggered.

"That sniggering you do is really annoying," Evon said.

"You are such a typical Scorpio," Bell said.

"I'm Pisces. Not that I believe in that sort of rubbish."

"Pisces," Bell said. "That surprised me. Pisceans are usually a lot ... well ... softer. I thought you said you were a Scorpio before."

"I did." Evon turned her head away so that he couldn't see her smile. "But I was messing with your brain." The stone had been like obsidian, black glass spewed out of a volcano, now ice cool and smooth but retaining the crystalline memory of magma and hellish fury.

Chapter two

Evon glanced at her watch. Eleven fifteen. Five hours overtime. When she got home, her husband, Robert, was sitting in one of the leather armchairs, reading by the light of a lamp shaped like the Liberator. The Liberator was a space ship from *Blake's Seven*, Robert's favourite TV show. It had screened in the seventies or eighties and been forgotten by all but a few science fiction fanatics. Robert had made the lamp himself from a vintage model that he'd bought on eBay.

"You shouldn't have waited up," Evon said. "It's a miracle that I'm home this early. Thought I'd be out all night."

"I was worried. You didn't call." Robert put his Asimov paperback down on the coffee table. "So, did you catch anyone?"

"Yes, two. An African girl and a guy."

"Duds? Or in breach?"

"Duds. Haven't positively IDed them yet, though. She's 'lost' her passport and he's just not talking. Don't even know what language he speaks yet."

"Typical." Robert knew a lot about compliance matters. He didn't talk much

but was a receptive listener when Evon related her work activities. "I made you dinner."

"Oh, good. What is it?"

"Spaghetti bolognaise."

"Great." She put her compliance paraphernalia on the table: radio, badge, notebook, handcuffs, mobile phone, rubber gloves, torch, and pens. "Tess, okay?"

"Sure."

Evon's daughter was six years old, interested in pet mice and goldfish, playing with dolls and knitting very short scarves. Evon would occasionally wear one of Tess's miniature scarves, an emerald one, about thirty centimeters long. She would drape it across the back of her neck where it would rest like a plump green snake.

Evon sat down and watched as Robert placed her dinner on the coffee table. He poured her a glass of wine then turned on the DVD player. "I thought we'd watch something light," he said. "Seeing as it's so late. How do you feel about watching *Trial*?"

"Sure." This was the *Blake's Seven* episode where Blake decides he needs some time to be by himself so transports down to a planet that turns out to be a space creature covered with flea-like humanoids who hatch from clusters of eggs. The main character, a flea person by the name of Sil, ends up dying tragically.

"So, it sounds like you had a busy day." Robert was a Customs officer. They'd met at the airport when Evon was removing a recalcitrant working holiday maker and her ten foot long surfboard.

"No, not too bad."

One of the very first things that Robert had asked Evon when they met, was whether or not she had watched *Blake's Seven*. She had. Not only had she watched it, but she also, albeit vaguely, remembered the names of the characters and most of the actors who played them. On their fifth wedding anniversary, Robert had told Evon that the genesis of his love for her was when she had introduced herself: "Evon." His surname was "Carr". Put together "Evon Carr", the name sounded almost identical to that of one of the lead characters in *Blake's Seven*: "Avon Kerr." To Evon, it hadn't seemed a great deal upon which to base a relationship. However, it had sufficed.

Chapter three

The detention centre, a drab building constructed in the sixties, was located near the airport. It looked like a cheap office building except that it was surrounded by high walls topped with razor wire. Evon went in and stood in the entry, a room with a peeling lino floor, two vending machines selling snacks and a few plastic seats. Half of one wall was mirrored glass, and Evon knew that behind it was the control room for the guards contracted to run the centre. Only three immigration officers worked at the centre and they didn't have a great deal to do with the detainees—they mostly performed administrative tasks.

She pressed the button on the intercom near a glass door. "One compliance officer to visit detainee." While she waited for the guard to come, she read for the hundredth time the poster that hung on the wall. It stated, amongst other things, that visitors were not to bring food into the facility or mobile phones or alcohol. Curiously, either due to administrative oversight or perhaps because the writer of the poster didn't want to put ideas into the heads of the visitors, the poster did not forbid drugs or weapons. Evon noticed, as she did every time she came to the IDC, that there were two obvious spelling mistakes and one grammatical error in the poster.

The door opened and Evon showed her badge to the guard, a chunky woman with short, practical hair who looked to be in her fifties. "Busy?"

"Yeah," the guard said. "Pretty busy. Shipped off a few detainees to Sydney, though."

"Have the new detainees been any trouble?"

"Well, the girl's been pretty good. The new officer, the curly haired one, VINED her this morning. He was in there for ages. But the guy's a problem. He's the opposite. Won't say a word. Didn't eat any breakfast or lunch. He's still in isolation because he won't see the nurse. He should eat, at least. As long as it's not a razor blade, eh?" It was all too common for detainees to attempt to commit suicide by ingesting such items, though it wasn't usually the Africans who did it. It was more a Chinese thing. Evon had attended a course at National Office where they had explained that it was also a purely Australian phenomenon. In other countries, like the USA, Canada and the UK, detainees rarely self-harmed.

"Who can blame him for preferring razors?"

The guard laughed. "As long as they weren't served with rice, eh?"

"Too true." It seemed that the cook prepared rice with every meal. Last week, she'd been at the centre over lunch and they'd served roast beef and vegetables with rice. The week before that, she'd had a sandwich with a side dish of rice. And before that, they'd had pancakes with rice.

"Go to the interview room, love. I'll bring him in to you. Shouldn't be too long. Might have to wake him up, though." They both walked into the control room. The guard glanced at a bank of monitors. "It's okay. He's awake."

Evon went to the interview room and sat down on the duress alarm side of the table. There was a sticker next to the alarm that stated that if she pressed the button then the DART (Duress Alarm Response Team) would come to her assistance. At one point, the establishment of a Fire Alarm Response Team had been considered, but the acronym had caused problems so the concept had been dropped. She took out her briefcase and laid out her various forms and notebooks. After a minute or so, a male guard poked his head in the door. "I've got him for you. Here he is."

"Thanks." She stood up as the man came in. This was her first opportunity to take a good look at him. He wasn't overly tall, perhaps five feet seven or so, but muscular and heavily built. She noted that his wrists were abraded and bruised, no doubt as a result of the handcuffing. He had shoulder length hair worn in dreadlocks. Each dreadlock sported a carved bead, some in silver, and others appearing to be gemstones.

"How are you today?" she asked. "Settling in?"

The man stared at her.

"My name's Evon Carr. I'm an immigration officer. We met last night." The man's face was blank but something told Evon that he understood her. "Do you understand?"

No response. It was unusual for a detainee not to talk like this. Evon couldn't recall it ever happening before. Usually, they'd respond with a few "no comments" or equivalent, but perfect silence was very strange.

She rang TIS, the telephone interpreting service, and asked them to ask him

in a variety of languages what his name was.

Still, no response. Throughout the procedure, the man just stared at her, his lips slightly upturned, his expression kindly. He looked ready to listen though not to talk.

Evon wrote in her notebook that the detainee wasn't responding to any questions and that she could not determine what language he spoke. "So, do you have any family back home?"

His expression changed, his faint smile disappearing, and Evon realised he definitely understood English. "A wife? Children? I doubt they'd like to know you've been hanging out in a brothel. You work there?"

He leant back in the chair and crossed his arms over his chest.

"I know you can understand me. There's no point in not talking. It just means you're going to be stuck in here for longer. It's not the nicest environment, is it? Maybe if I knew who you were, I'd be able to consider giving you a bridging visa, you know, a temporary visa. You'd be able to get out of here, check on your wife, make sure she's okay. She must be worried about you. But, I can't let you out if I don't know who you are. You could be anyone. A terrorist. A war criminal. A criminal. I don't know."

She studied his face. "It could take days before I can get someone down here to fingerprint you. Then, we have to send the prints off to see if anyone has a record of you. Could take months. More likely years. Especially if you've got no prints on file. The IDC could be your new home. There are people who've been here for five, six years, even longer." She tapped her fingernails against the scuffed

melamine surface of the table. She inhaled the odour of cooking vegetables, maybe cabbage, and heard one of the guards laughing outside the door.

Obviously, the man wasn't going to talk. As he had to be identified before he was removed or granted a bridging visa, this would entail some tedious research and investigation on Evon's part. She hated clients like this.

He leant back in his chair, very relaxed. The smile was back and Evon found it reassuring. Maybe he would reply to her. "Can you talk?"

Silence.

"I can wait. I can wait a long time."

The man slowly pulled a bead off one of his dreadlocks. His eyes did not leave Evon's as he put out his open palm. A glossy agate bead, intricately carved into a beetle. Evon stared at it. He stared at her. She took it.

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It was dark green and made of stone. It had tiny red eyes that glittered like glass, and its wings and head were outlined with thick dark lines. When she turned it over, it had small pictures scratched on its flat side.

"That's nice. A beetle. Where did you get it?" Mum was decorating a hat for the Melbourne Cup do at the Labor Club. She'd made a horse's head out of felt and was attaching it to an old sun hat that she'd bought for fifty cents from the Salvos. There were seed pearls and a few sequins stuck in her long black hair, and

there was a smear of glue on her cheek.

"I dreamed it. Wasn't a beetle," Evon said. "Now it's a beetle."

Mum glued a big gold cardboard horse shoe around the neck of the horse. Every Melbourne Cup day, she wore one of her hats to the club and won first prize. Last year, she'd won a weekend for two at the Hyatt Hotel, two bottles of wine and a box of chocolates. The year before that, she'd won \$500, a gym membership and some movie tickets.

"Look!" Evon gave the beetle to Mum who took it carefully, as if it were alive and very precious. Mum loved Egyptian things because, although all her friends called her "CC", her real name was "Doctor Cleopatra Cooper". She wore her black hair in a bob with a fringe so she'd look like Cleopatra and drew black lines around her eyes. When she went to parties, she'd put on emerald eye shadow, and sometimes, she wore a gold bracelet in the shape of a snake around the top of her arm.

"You dreamed it very authentically. The Egyptians almost always made their scarabs out of green stone. Is it Jade? Maybe Aventurine?"

"It's a beetle," Evon said. "Wasn't a beetle in my dream."

"What was it?"

"A kiss."

"Oh, how sweet." She turned it over. "Did you know the Egyptians considered scarabs to be lucky? Oh, it's even got hieroglyphics! Let me see." She picked up the magnifying glass that she used when gluing on seed pearls. "A drop of water. A lightning bolt. A snowflake. A sun. What does it mean, I wonder?"

Evon shook her head. Mum was a bit dumb sometimes. "It's everything people feel."

"Ah, I see." Mum handed the beetle back. "Everything, eh?" She picked up the scissors again and snipped a few threads off the edge of the horse's ear. Last year, she'd made three hats. She'd worn the worst one, the one which was supposed to represent Victory through the abstract use of Mondrian colours and shapes, but which had turned out looking like the ABC test pattern. The other two, she'd given to her friends, Viv and Edna, to wear. She'd still won first prize, and her friends had come second and third.

"Beetle for you."

"Really! Thank you! I like it." This year Mum was only making one hat. She'd told Evon that she felt a bit mean winning all the prizes last year. The women with the expensive hats they'd bought in Sydney from the designer shops had been upset. They'd looked lovely in their Eliza Doolittle monochromes but Evon's Mum's hats with their outlandish colours, wild streamers and cascades of crystal always pulled in the prizes. Evon thought it wasn't just the hats that won the prizes over, it was her Mum. She smiled so big and laughed and danced along the stage. No one could resist. The judges loved her.

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"Everyone loved Mum," Evon said.

The man didn't say anything.

"I remember it so clearly. I dreamed of a beetle and then it was there." She swallowed. Her throat was dry and she was dying for a drink of water. "Do you dream?"

The man just stared at her. The skin on her face burned. Of course, he had no idea what she was talking about. Why would he?

"I have to go back to work." Evon rolled the bead between her fingers and then held it hard in her fist. "I'll check on you in a few days." She'd never done this before. Talked about herself to a total stranger. An UNC!

Back at the office, she emailed NIVA, the section at National Office responsible for assisting to identify people who had no documentation. They were useless but it was a requirement that she notify them. She also asked the investigations section to go down ASAP and take the man's fingerprints. Then she sat down at her computer to start entering the detention information onto ICSE, the recording system used by the department.

Frederick, a blind man in his thirties, was sitting at his desk, fiddling around typing something. He had bushy red hair and a face that was encrusted with freckles. He was tall, over six feet, and well built. It looked as if he spent hours at the gym. The computer droned out the contents of his document. "So, did you find out who he is?" Frederick asked.

"Nope." Evon sent an email off to the Detention Review Manager notifying him that an unidentified person had been detained and that due to a lack of information she could not satisfy herself that he was an Unlawful Non-Citizen.

"Willy wants to let the African girl out," Frederick said. "You know, the one with identity issues. Rose aka Rebekah." Willy was only a few metres away at the printer. Evon could tell by the stiffness of his shoulders that he'd heard his name mentioned. "Says he wants to give her a bridging E visa for three months. So she can pack up her stuff and leave as a monitored departure."

"Three months!" Evon said. "You've got to be joking? Why so long? What does she need to pack up? Her whip and fluffy manacles? She ain't going nowhere! We only grant bridging E visas for a week or so at a time."

"Is it unlawful to grant for three months?" Frederick asked.

"There's no limit on how long we grant them. It's just an unwritten rule. It's not even in the policy."

"What if you granted one for a hundred years? What if you granted one for eternity?"

"You have to have a reason to grant a BVE. The most common reason is 'for departure'. So, if you granted one for a hundred years, it could be argued that it's not 'for departure purposes' and then you might be able to cancel it. However, all the visa holder would have to say is that that he does intend to depart. He just doesn't know when. It's a loophole."

"I'm surprised the department hasn't changed the Act," Frederick said.

"They won't try to do that until someone actually grants a bridging visa for a hundred years. The department tends to be reactive rather than proactive." She shrugged. "Did Willy want to ask for a bond?"

"Five grand. That should slow her down."

"No way! She'd probably earn that in a night's work. Anyway, it's not up to him to decide. She's my case. He was just responsible for VINing her. I'll be interviewing her later on and I'll make a decision on the bridging visa."

"Willy spoke about it to Bell. He supports it," Frederick said.

"He is so soft." She'd asked Bell once why he worked for immigration, let alone compliance. He said he'd been placed there when he'd expressed an interest in working in the Refugee and Humanitarian branch. For the first year, he'd done everything he could to transfer out. Then, he'd realised he could actually bring some compassion to compliance and decided to stay. "We'll never see her again, that's for sure. I don't know why we bother locating them in the first place."

"Hey, Bell!" Willy walked back from the printer, a sheaf of papers in his hand. He flicked a paperclip at Bell which missed and bounced off his computer monitor. "Is your first name 'Alarm'?"

"Hey, Rhodes!" Bell hung up the phone and leant back in his chair. "Is your first name, 'Rocky'?" He picked up the paperclip and tossed it at Willy. He ducked and the paper clip bounced off the computer and hit Evon in the head, where it stuck in her hair.

Evon patted her head trying to find the paperclip. Fucking infantile idiots! They spent the whole time flicking office stationery at each other and cracking repetitive jokes.

"Is Ms Carr's first name, 'Big Red'?", Willy said. "Or is it 'street'?"

"Your first name should be 'Penis'. Oh! I guess it is, eh, Willy?" Evon finally found the paperclip, pulled it out her hair and tossed it into her drawer.

"Not funny." Willy sat down at his desk and pulled an elastic band out of a

supersize plastic bag. "God, I'm so busy." He added the elastic band to a ball he'd been constructing for the last month. It was about the size of a softball. He put his boots up on the desk. Lord, he was a typical Queenslander with his desert boots, moleskins and checked shirts. Sometimes, he even wore an Akubra to work. "We need more staff in this area."

Only because he was so lazy!

Bell was on the phone again. "So, what's the guy's name?" He scribbled something on a pad. "When did he enter Australia?"

Evon stared at the bridging E visa application that someone had put on her desk. One of her detainees, a Korean UNC who had been working as a tiler, wanted to be let out. No chance. He was going home as soon as the removals section organised his travel documents and tickets. After going to all the trouble to locate him, to raid his apartment and detain him, there was no way she was going to let him out. She didn't think that there was a bond large enough to stop him from disappearing into the community. She started on the paperwork required to keep him locked up. If she didn't finalise this before the end of the day, the law would force her to release him. Then, she'd be in trouble. An elastic band twanged off her desk. Fucking Willy!

Bell slammed the phone down. "Okay! This is gold, guys. Pure gold. We've got a Vietnamese guy on an ETA working in a restaurant in Kingston. He'll be there for the next four hours. Let's move! Right now."

No one moved.

"Evon?"

"Nah, I'm busy refusing a BVE. Rather, I'm busy *considering* a BVE. I have

to get it done before close of business today or he's free. By operation of law."

"Willy?"

"I'm ready."

Bell glanced around the office. "Could do with another man."

"Well, there won't be a shortage of volunteers," Evon said. Everyone in the compliance section was desperate to be on a field team. Unfortunately, choosing an officer to temporarily assist on a job usually resulted in such resentment and jealousy from those not chosen that the team leaders dreaded making a selection. The repercussions could last for weeks.

"Take Frederick." Willy said. "He's dying to go."

"He's blind," Evon said.

Bell shook his head. "Visually impaired."

"Blind," Evon said. "He won't be able to do the job."

"We need to have a talk about diversity," Bell said. "I'll see if I can find a time next week. Maybe we could send you on a refresher course."

"It doesn't matter what course you send me on, he'll still be blind." Maybe a different approach would work. Bell understood compassion. "He could get hurt. Someone could punch him out; he could fall down some stairs. There are OH&S issues."

"He holds a black belt in karate. He's better able to handle himself than we are." Bell sighed. "He'll be fine, Evon."

Suddenly Evon saw the genius of Bell's suggestion. No one could complain

if a blind man were chosen. Anyone who did complain would instantly be labelled as being insensitive and not supportive of diversity in the workplace. "If he's so great, send him out on his own."

"Now, you're just being silly." Bell bent a paperclip into a figure eight. "We'll do the job later in the week. All right. Put together a running sheet for next week. Put at least five jobs on it."

"Sure."

"Oh, and talking about courses reminds me. We've got a training course to go to in National Office in a few weeks. It's called Good Decision Making for People. It should be pretty funky. Lots of great activities."

"Count me out."

"You're coming. It's an area you need to develop more strength in. Well, we all do."

"Who else is going?" Evon asked.

"Willy, me and Frederick."

"Why Frederick?"

"We're training him up to join the team. We need more diversity in compliance."

"I'm all for diversity. Obviously. How about we get someone who can speak Thai? That would be politically correct and useful."

"Diversity isn't just about cultural factors."

"And it certainly isn't about being practical."

"You never know when to let go, do you, Evon?" Bell stuck his two little fingers through the loops in the paper clip and wiggled them. Like a miniature set of handcuffs.

"It's about the principles of good management," Evon said. "Persist to achieve good outcomes."

"I feel we may differ on what a good outcome is."

"So," Evon said. "Given that Frederick is coming along, what will he actually be doing? Driving? Oh no! That's right. He's blind. So, no driving. What about searching for travel docs? Oops, you need to be able to see to do that. How about taking notes? Oh dear, I guess you need to be able to see to take notes—" Lord, she couldn't think of anything that he could do. Well, the brothels were pretty dark sometimes. He'd probably have a better chance of finding his way around them than she would. On the other hand, she always had a torch in her bum-bag for situations like that.

"He can do the ID checks and make the calls back to base to check on immigration status."

"Oh, sure. I guess he'll be able to read the passports using Braille. Oh dear, passports aren't written in Braille. How inconvenient." Evon watched Bell's face. He was very angry but was succeeding in maintaining his liberal, left wing, greenie, tree-hugging hippy equilibrium. His struggle was really quite sweet.

"All right. He can guard an exit."

"I assume we'll be applying a 'no chase' policy, then?" She walked over to the window and stared out across the lake. Her skin prickled. It was almost as if

she could feel Bell's glare against her skin. Why did Frederick have to choose compliance? Why not document examination? Photography? Football referee? A cockatoo flew towards the window. At the last minute, it veered away, its wings flashing white. She had a sudden vision of it smashing against the glass and imagined the glass slowly shattering, floating through the air, spinning and tumbling as if suspended in zero gravity. Like almond blossom caught in a flurry of wind. What would it be like standing on the grey carpet, surrounded by computers and files, but with no windows? She'd be standing in a flood of sunshine, in overwhelming, intense light that would make her eyes water. The floor would seem spectacular, sequined and beglittered. It would have been transformed by violence into something beautiful.

"Are you listening to me?" Bell asked. "You could face me when I'm talking to you."

But she was mesmerised by her inner vision. It was as if thousands of carats of diamonds had been heaped onto the floor. But there were no diamonds, just a hundred imploded plate glass windows. Theoretically, it would be possible to pick up every shard and splinter and reconstruct the building.

She imagined crunching over the floor, grinding diamonds underfoot, and standing on the very edge. Jagged stalactites of glass would fringe the window frame, threatening to break free and fall to the ground, to the concrete, to be pulverised into powder as fine and as sweet as icing sugar.

"Evon!" Bell's voice, very irritated now.

She turned around. "I'm listening."

"I said, definitely no chase. No chase!" His phone buzzed as he received an SMS. He took the mobile out of his pocket and quickly thumbed in a reply. She could see he had already calmed down. "Actually, that reminds me," he said. "We've got a tough job on soon. Steph needs us to go with character and removals to pick up a 501 cancellation case. This guy, Dave Morrison, came to Australia from the UK when he was three years old with his parents. He's got an extensive criminal history—very violent. Seven years ago, he killed a guy in a brawl in a pub. Stomped on his head. He was sentenced to seven years and served five years. He got out of jail two years ago. Character section cancelled his visa yesterday."

"And, it only took them two years to get around to it," Evon said. "Efficient!"

"A guy from National Office removals will be coming down early next week to brief us. This is going to be a very difficult multi-agency operation."

"Fine, tell me about it tomorrow," Evon said. "I'm going home."

Catching a bus is an art and a ritual. Evon always caught the 6:30 bus home and always sat in the same seat next to the man with Down syndrome. He always had a yo yo with him. Usually, a basic Coca Cola one but sometimes a yellow or a bright red one. Today, he had the Coca Cola one.

Every day she saw the same people doing the same things. The fat woman always stood up, probably too ashamed to occupy three seats. The blonde girl with the spots listened to music on her iPod and moved her lips not so silently along with the music. She was droning: "Nothing sweet about me ..."

The man with Down syndrome stared at Evon. He said, "Hello, Mum."

“Hello, son,” Evon said. The man gurgled a laugh and Evon let one half of her mouth, the right side, smile back at him. He was the only bearable person on the bus. She had no idea why he always said, “Hello, Mum” to her or why she replied, but it was part of the daily ritual, a habit that she wouldn’t break.

The bus was annoying. She particularly disliked it when the person sitting next to her had a cold and was coughing and blowing his nose. She hated the men who smelled like sweat, and the women who smelled like perfume.

Even the positives about riding the bus were negatives. She secretly enjoyed critiquing the outfits of other passengers. Pants too short. Shoes too pointy. Dog hair on a black jacket. Ears pierced too many times. Eyebrows plucked too thin. A multitude of imperfections. If only they could all be detained and removed, sent back to their countries of origin. They were all immigrants. It was lucky the Aboriginals didn’t have the multi-layered universal visa system or mandatory detention. They were too civilised for that.

Sometimes, Evon wondered about the dreams of the people on the bus. She suspected that their dreams were mediocre and powerless. They probably dreamed of teeth falling out, being naked in public, flying or falling. Empty bland dreams with no substance. Banal dreams for banal people. They probably looked up their dreams in on-line dream dictionaries that said dreaming of cats meant betrayal or dreaming of money meant hope. How many of them had dreamed of a black and white landscape, a world as monochrome as the surface of the moon, but filled with red and orange flowers, and awoken to find a single glowing fiery amber petal on their bedside table? How many of them had dreamed of fighting an invisible creature with glass claws and awoken to find their skin covered in fine red

scratches?

"Excuse me," a girl said.

Evon stared at her. It was unthinkable that someone would speak to a fellow passenger. Was the girl unaware of the invisible barrier that separated them? The force field that made inter-commuter interaction impossible.

"I couldn't help noticing your badge. You work for immigration?"

Evon touched the name badge which she'd stupidly forgotten to take off.

"Er, yes."

"Immigration interests me. I've seen that show on TV. Border security. It looks so exciting. How do I get a job there?"

Evon toyed with the idea of replying, you need to know someone. However, she guessed that the truth was not what the girl wanted. "You need to read the Public Service Gazette. It's on-line. Or you could go to the immigration website." Several passengers were staring at her. Perhaps they wanted to provide some input on immigration's tendency to lock up and remove Australian citizens by accident.

"Is it a good place to work? You like it?"

She hated having conversations with strangers. "It's fairly interesting." The man with Down syndrome looked at her with a concerned expression. He seemed to know she liked her privacy.

"What do you do exactly? Chase people. Raid brothels. It sounds so great."

"Sure, it is."

"It sounds so cool. Tell me about it."

"Sure." What could Evon tell her? That the public service was the last bastion of liberalism in an increasingly conservative society. The reds under the beds had abandoned the dust kitties, lost tissues and porn magazines that lurked under the mattress, and were thriving in the left-wing sanctuary of the APS. Or should she tell the girl the opposite, that immigration was a remnant of fascism. After all, the service was a model hierarchy. Your APS level not only determined your salary and responsibilities but also your IQ, credibility and competence. And if compliance didn't exemplify the characteristics of absolutism then what did? Both versions seemed equally true.

"But, I'm a hairdresser. I suppose they want people with degrees in politics or something."

"Not really." The public service believed in fungibility. Everyone was, if not already equal, potentially equal, and employees were pieces in a jigsaw puzzle depicting a diverse multicultural pastiche of smiling, companionable faces. Every piece in the puzzle could be interchanged with another. A filing clerk who left school at age fourteen and had never read anything more challenging than a Hungry Jack's menu could complete a two hour training course entitled "Writing for the APS" and become a writer of operational procedures and guidelines. Someone with a Ph.D. in computer science could be slotted straight into processing business visas. A hairdresser would, no doubt, make an excellent immigration fraud investigator. The concept of placing people according to their qualifications, experience, personality and inclination was abhorrent to the public service.

"So, what are they after, then?"

The man with Down syndrome leant forward and stared earnestly into the girl's face. "She doesn't like to talk."

Evon raised an eyebrow. He was right.

"She only looks. She doesn't talk." He pointed a finger at the girl. "You should leave her alone."

"Thanks," Evon said, "but I can handle this on my own, I think."

The man nodded slowly. "Okay."

The bus stopped. "Thanks for that," the girl said to Evon. "I'll look up some of that stuff online." The girl alighted.

Evon looked at the man. He was staring straight ahead wearing a blank expression and swaying slightly. "Thank you," she said. "I appreciate your trying to help me out. You're right. I don't like to talk."

"You like to look." He smiled. "You look at people and get angry with them."

"Yes, I guess so." The bus jolted to a stop and a couple of school kids got out. Two teenage girls wearing tight, stretchy fashion store outfits vaguely resembling the official uniform of Belconnen high school.

"We always sit on the bus together," Evon said.

"Yes. You sit next to me." He shook his head slowly. "No one else does. Even when the bus has lots of people on it."

"Mmmm. So, what's your name?"

"Alex." He smiled "What's your name?"

“Evon.”

He held out his hand. “Nice to meet you.”

“Indeed.” She shook his hand.

Chapter four

"Where's your wife, Mr Parker?" Evon asked. Two children clung to their father's legs, crying. They looked to be about two and four years old. Tiny little girls.

The man responded slowly, too slowly to be telling the truth. "In Perth."

"Why's she there?" She smelled food cooking. The table in the dining area adjacent to the lounge room was set with four places.

"For work."

"What work does she do?" Bell and Willy came back into the lounge room. They'd been searching the house. Frederick was standing by the front door. Blindly, guarding the exit. Bell raised an eyebrow at Evon and she understood that he had found something that indicated that the woman still lived here, a clue.

A glimmer of realisation changed the man's face. "No, she's looking for work. She's not working."

"Why in Perth?"

"She has an interview for a job there." He looked at his watch. A quick furtive glance.

"What job?"

"I'm not —" He wiped his eyes. Evon saw that he was trying hard not to cry.

"What company?"

"I forget now. It's a catering company."

"She's unlawful. She can't work."

"I know. It's just that I'm out of work. I lost my job. We're desperate. We've got two children to think about." Evon noticed him look at his watch again. He was an Australian citizen. The children were, also. However, his wife was not.

"So, she's in Perth."

The man nodded.

"Do you have a car?" Evon had noticed there was no car parked outside the house.

"Yes."

"Where is it?"

"My wife took it with her."

"What? Did she pack it in a suitcase?"

"It's a Subaru. A blue one."

"So, how did she take it?"

"She drove it."

"To Perth?" It was amazing how badly most people lied. Evon was constantly agog at the ineptitude of the average liar. It was very rare for her to come across someone who was genuinely skilled in deceit. She thought about the black guy she'd detained. It was annoying that he wouldn't speak to her, but it was better than having to listen to the same old lies. "It's a long way to drive."

About a year ago, she'd had a client, a Bosnian man, who had applied for protection, been refused, gone to the Minister asking for intervention and had been refused again. He'd been a fabulous liar. Although he'd been working unlawfully on his bridging visa he'd told her very convincingly that he was unemployed. Evon had believed him. He also told her that he was happy to return to Bosnia and that he would buy his air tickets and renew his passport and leave within two weeks. Evon had believed him. He'd absconded.

Six months later, when Evon had been on leave, a junior officer traced him via ATO records to a small town. Despite the fact that he had a minor criminal record and had absconded in the past from immigration, he'd conned the officer into giving him another bridging visa for two weeks. He absconded again.

Later, Evon had looked him up on the internet and found out that he was a well-known actor in his home country who'd starred in a popular soap opera and in several successful films. When she thought about his performance in the interview room, she understood that he had been too good at portraying a truthful man. He had been so convincing that she should have suspected that he was lying. From then on she was not just suspicious of those who obviously were lying but also of those who were obviously telling the truth. However, her current client was not in his class. He was lying and lying badly.

"Yes. She likes driving."

"I see." Evon smelled burning. Dinner wasn't going to be in very good shape at this rate. "When's she coming back?"

The man looked at his watch again. A foolish reflex. "In a few weeks."

"Who's coming for dinner?"

"What?"

"The table's set for four."

"We have a friend coming to visit."

"What's the friend's name?"

Again, the hesitation. "Michael Lo." He picked up the smallest of the children and clasped her tightly. She stopped crying and leant her head against his chest. She was a cute kid. Her hair was pinned back neatly with *Hello Kitty* hair slides and she was wearing matching pajamas and slippers. "Can I just phone him and tell him to come later, when you're finished here?"

"No."

"I'll tell you the truth," he said. "My wife and I aren't together any more. She left me."

Bell handed Evon his open notebook. She read: Female toiletries including deodorant, toothbrush and makeup in *ensuite* bathroom. No handbag found. Expired passport in drawer next to bed. No current visa in passport. Female clothing in closet. Female underwear in drawers.

"She just left you and the kids?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Week ago."

"That must be hard, what with the kids," Willy said. "They must miss her."

The man nodded.

"Where's Mummy?" the little girl asked. "When she coming home?"

"She's not," Mr Parker said quietly, so quietly it was a wonder the little girl could hear him.

"Did the bogeyman take her?" the girl asked. "Will the bogeyman take me?"

"There is no bogeyman," Evon said. Why did parents fill their children's heads with such rubbish? She suddenly thought of her favourite childhood story, "The Snow Queen". The Snow Queen rode in on her white sled and stole children away to live in her ice palace. She was a type of bogeyman.

Daddy had read her a story. It was a book that his Mum had given him when he was little. The book was old with thick creamy pages and pictures in black ink.

"The Snow Queen" was a long story and it had taken Daddy ages to read it. It had seven parts to it. So, Daddy had read one part every night for a week. Usually Evon liked stories that had lots of pictures and that Daddy could read all at once. But this time, she hadn't minded that it was so long and that it only had a couple of tiny black and white illustrations. The story was about a little girl and a little boy who were friends. There was an evil mirror that made everything look

ugly. The mirror got broken and slivers of glass sliced into the heart and the eye of a little boy and he got mean. His heart was frozen and he was mean to his friend. His eye was broken by the glass and everything he saw was ugly. Even pretty things like roses and babies and kittens. They all looked bad. Then the little boy was stolen away by the Snow Queen. She took him to live in her ice palace and the only way he could escape was if he solved a really hard puzzle. He had to make the word "Eternity" from broken bits of ice. Then the boy's friend finds him and her tears wash the broken mirror out of his heart and eye and everything is happy ever after.

"What do you think the Snow Queen looked like?" she asked.

"Well," Daddy said. "She is described in the story. He flicked through the book and read, 'The snowflake appeared larger and larger, and at last took the form of a lady dressed in the finest white crepe, her attire being composed of millions of star-like particles. She was exquisitely fair and delicate, but entirely of ice—glittering, dazzling ice; her eyes gleamed like two bright stars, but there was no rest or repose in them.' He turned to another page. 'Also, here, on this other page, she's described as tall and slender and dazzlingly white. Oh, and as 'beautiful, intelligent, lovely and perfect'."

"What colour hair does she have?" Evon asked.

"Well, it doesn't really say. Maybe black like yours. Or maybe it's white like snow."

Evon didn't think the Snow Queen's hair would be white. Old people had white hair and the Snow Queen was young. Certainly, her hair would be black like Evon's. "What colour skin does she have?"

"Well, it says that she's 'fair', so she's probably got pale skin."

"My skin is really white," Evon said. "Susie said I was a ghost." Susie was a girl at school. She was Evon's friend but she was always saying mean things.

"Yep, you're quite pale," Daddy said. "Like your Mum. She's very fair skinned."

"What colour eyes does the Snow Queen have?"

"Hmmm. It doesn't say. What do you think?"

Evon stared into Daddy's eyes. They were a lovely pale blue. Mum's eyes were blue, too, but they were a deeper blue. Like the sea. "I think they were brown like mine," she said. "The Snow Queen has brown eyes. Like chocolate. Maybe like Maltesers."

Daddy rubbed his temples hard. He didn't look very happy. Probably he was tired. Maybe it was past his bedtime. "Yes, brown eyes," he said. "Brown eyes just like Maltesers."

"This is my favourite story," Evon said. "What's your favourite, Daddy?"

"I'm not sure." He brushed his hair back from his eyes. Mum said his hair was too long. It always flopped over his eyes. Mum said it made him look like a poet even though he actually worked for the tax office. "Maybe, Thumbelina."

Daddy had read her that story before. It was about a woman who wanted a baby very badly. One day she found a tiny little baby girl and then she was happy, but the baby girl got stolen away. It was sad. "That's a good story," Evon said. "But, it's not my favourite."

"Isn't it scary enough for you?" Daddy knew that Evon liked stories that were frightening.

"It is a bit scary, especially the frog and the mole, but not as scary as 'The Snow Queen.'" Evon imagined that maybe the Snow Queen would come for her and take her away and make her live in her ice palace. What if broken pieces of a mirror got stuck in her eye and in her heart? Would Daddy get them out by giving her a kiss?

The little girl stared at Evon, her eyes wide. She was sucking her thumb. Perhaps she thought Evon was the bogeyman.

Frederick spoke: "Car approaching. Sounds like a small late model vehicle. Maybe a Subaru, something like that. Needs a tune up."

"What colour is it, Freddy?" Evon wondered what it would have been like if she'd been born blind. When she was a child, she had thought she could bring back objects from her dreams. What sort of objects would she have brought back from the dream world? How would she have brought back a sound? How would she have brought back a texture? Fluffiness? Smoothness? The dreams of the blind. What would they look like?

"The name's 'Frederick', thanks. It's coming this way," Frederick added. "Up

this driveway."

Evon listened, holding her breath, and heard the sound of tyres outside.

"Who's that?"

"Michael." The man started towards the door.

"Stay where you are, please, sir."

Bell went over to the door, ready to intercept whoever entered.

"I can hear heels, about one inch." Frederick's voice was soft. "A small female."

Evon heard the sound of the lock turning. It seemed unlikely that "Michael" would have a door key.

A woman came through the door. She wore a Hungry Jack's uniform and held a bag of groceries in one hand. In the other hand, she held her keys.

"Sula Parker?" Bell asked.

"Yes?"

"My name's Officer Bell. I'm a compliance officer from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. Mrs Parker, I find that I have reasonable suspicion that you are an unlawful non-citizen. Therefore, I am detaining you under Section 189 of the Migration Act. You are not free to leave. You're going to have to come along with us to the detention centre so we can chat with you about your immigration status. We'll have to see whether or not you're eligible for a temporary visa or not."

The woman started to cry. "I can't leave the children."

"We're just going to have a chat," Bell said. "It's most likely we'll be able to give you a bridging visa and we'll be able to work something out. But, we have to talk first. Do you want to call a lawyer or migration agent?"

She shook her head.

"Do you need an interpreter?"

"No, I speak English fine."

"Any medical conditions?"

"No."

"Do you take drugs?"

She shook her head.

"Are you on any medication at all?"

"No."

"Good. Come on now. We'll drive you home when we've worked things out. It'll take a couple of hours." He took a card out of his pocket and handed it to Mr Parker. "Don't worry, she'll be okay."

Mrs Parker sat in the plastic chair, hunched over, her hair straggling over her face. Evon compared her to the picture in her passport. The girl in the passport photo was slender, not skinny, and had smooth unblemished skin. Her hair was sleek and thick, pulled back with a shiny red plastic headband. The girl in front of Evon was emaciated and blotchy. She had a big cold sore on her top lip and her hair looked thin and patchy. "What visa did you enter Australia on?"

"Tourist visa." She spoke as if each word hurt. "I came here sixteen years ago from Vietnam. On holiday."

"Were you a sex worker?" It was a fairly safe assumption. "Did you work in a brothel?"

"No. No. I come to look at koalas."

"If you want a bridging visa then you need to tell me the truth. If you lie, if you're uncooperative, then I'm going to have to stick you in the detention centre. I'll have no choice. You need to cooperate with me or you won't be going home to your family tonight."

"Okay, okay, I knew a man. He could organise a visa for you if he liked you. My friend got a visa and she came to Australia. She worked and then she find a nice Aussie man. She marry him and they have kids. She wrote me letters describing her big house with dishwashing machine and microwave. She had her own car, a red one. The kids go to a good school and will go to university. The man said that the Aussie men liked Asian chicks. The Aussie chicks are all too fat and are too bossy. It's easy to get nice rich man in Australia. So, the man, he gets me a visa."

"How did he do that?"

"He say that his sister who live in Australia is my sister. We have the same name. Nguyen. And his sister sponsor me. He said I owe him \$20 000 Australia dollars and that I can pay him back by working in his sister's business. She own acrylic nail shop and massage parlour. He said she would train me to do acrylic nails. All the Aussie girls have horrible nails so they always get fake nails. Big

business. I very happy with that.

"So, I go to Australia. He tell me what to say to immigration officers at the airport. I say that I come to see the koalas and to see Sydney Harbour Bridge because it's so beautiful. I say I want to pat a kangaroo because they are so cute and maybe cuddle a joey. I have no problems going through immigration and customs.

"His sister and her husband pick me up at airport in big car. Very nice car. His sister very beautiful with sparkly stones on her fingernails and lots of rings. Her hair dyed brown and very fashionable clothes. High pointy heels and she had gold chain around her ankle, under her pantyhose, with tiny bell. I see she's very rich. Very lucky girl.

"She nice to me but her husband say nothing. They take me to a big house where lots of girls living and give me room to share with girl from Thailand. I think she a girl but it turns out she's a boy. Thai boygirls very popular in Australia. She tell me that there no job in the nail business yet but I can stay in her house and do some jobs for her. She says she train me in nails later. But, soon she put the pressure on. Says I owe her brother lots of money. She can't afford to keep feeding me and giving me nice room. So, I work in brothel. She take most of my money."

Evon wrote down what she said. It was beginning to look like she was going to have to get the AFP in for this one. It was a typical case of sexual trafficking even if it had happened eighteen years ago.

"When I pay her back, I leave brothel. It take five years to pay money back. Very hard time. I see with other girls that they get dobbed in to immigration when

money paid back. So, I run away. I meet Andy when I working at video store. We fall in love. We get married and have kids." She picked up a plastic cup and took a sip of water. Her hand was shaking badly. Her nails were bitten down almost to the cuticles and they were tinged slightly blue.

"You don't look very well. Do you take drugs?"

"No. Sick."

"What's wrong with you?"

"I just very sick. Been sick for long time now." She pushed her hair back from her face with bony fingers. The fluorescent light flickered and lent a slightly staccato, dislocated feel to Mrs Parker's movements.

"Sick with what?"

"It's not my fault. Just happens when you do what I did."

"Oh. How long have you been ill then?"

"Long time now. Don't know how long. Get it working in brothel maybe? I find out about it ten years ago."

"You have AIDS?"

"Yes. AIDS."

"Are you being treated for it?" Evon's eyes watered. The lights were too bright in the interview room and the flickering made them hurt. She wiped them quickly and focused on Mrs Parker who was still talking.

"Scared to go to hospital. No Medicare card."

"What about the kids? Are they okay? What about your husband?"

"Husband is okay. One of them, Jasmine, the baby, she HIV positive. Sapphire is okay." Her face said otherwise. Evon observed pure sorrow.

"I see."

"What will happen to me now?"

"I have to refer you to the AFP. They'll want to talk to you about the trafficking issue." Evon took a pad of forms from her briefcase. "In the meantime, I'm going to give you a Bridging E visa. As soon as you can, put in a spouse visa application." She pushed the form over to Mrs Parker and held out a pen. "You need to sign."

Mrs Parker took the pen. Her sleeve pulled up and Evon saw that she had a tattoo on her wrist. A butterfly. When Evon was six years old, she had woken up to find a butterfly on her pillow. It lay flat as if pinned to the pillow case and was dead. The butterfly's wings shone green and blue, flashy and insubstantial like cheap opal. It was unclear why she had dreamt a kitsch butterfly into existence but there it was. Evon had gently blown a puff of air at the butterfly and it had flicked into the air, twisted, fallen and drifted to the carpet. When it hit the ground, it shattered.

Evon snatched the form back. "Wait." She filled in the box that indicated that the visa holder would have permission to work. "Now sign."

Later that evening, at the Palace, Evon ordered cider, refusing the barman's offer of a glass. She preferred to drink out of the bottle. She took a swig, staring at the fake pressed tin ceiling. The place used to be a cinema before it was a pub. It still smelled faintly of popcorn and snow cones.

Bell leant on the bar, tapping his feet as if he were about to start to dance. "Good call, Evon, giving Mrs Parker a bridging visa with work. Not allowed, of course, but good nevertheless."

"I accidentally ticked the permission to work box." Evon shrugged and took a swig from the cider bottle. "I can be really stupid sometimes."

"No, you're never stupid."

"You have no idea," Evon said. "I'm a lot stupider than you realise." She sighed. "I suppose you feel sorry for her."

"In an ideal world," Bell said, "we'd make sure that people like her were looked after, given medical help, financial support, a social worker, a case manager to make sure the visa processing went well."

"Sounds so good that I might renounce my citizenship, get my permanent residency cancelled and become an UNC so I can be looked after by the government for life." Bell was so soft, it was almost amusing. He wanted to rescue people, to save them. The more damaged they were, the more he cared for them.

Bell laughed. "You're a public servant already."

Willy stared into his beer. "It's not right," he said. "Poor chick. Not her fault."

"Whose fault is it?" Evon took a swig from her bottle. "She can apply for a spouse visa. She just has to go offshore to do it."

"You know they've got no money. What about the kids? They're tiny and one of them is sick."

"I guess she should have thought of all this before she overstayed her visa,

hooked up with an Aussie and gave birth to two kids even though she knew she was HIV positive."

The Palace was seedily decorated to resemble a royal residence. Red velvet drapes swathed the rear wall and the picture rails were sprayed with gold paint to emulate gilt. Evon stared at a fading print depicting a white-wigged girl being pushed in a flowery swing while a suitor knelt at her feet.

"Be nice, people," Bell said. He put an arm around Evon's shoulders. "We're a team. We do what we have to do." Bell took an eye patch out of his pocket and put it on. Evon wasn't surprised. Bell was always doing weird quirky things. "Swing avast, me hearties." He staggered seaman-like over to a young woman wearing a midriff top covered in purple sequins and hipsters exposing the whale tail of an orange thong. "Hi!" He leant on the bar and smiled. His phone rang but he made no move to answer it. "I expect you're wondering about my eye," he said. "A nasty business." He winked at the girl with his uncovered eye. "Shall I tell you more?"

"He's amazing," Willy said. "I bet if I walked up to a chick wearing an eye patch and talking like a pirate she'd just slap my face and call the cops."

"Yep." The music was loud. A band consisting of a skinny Goth girl and three long-haired Goth boys was singing a plaintive Indie rock piece. "Where's Frederick?" Evon said. "Have we lost him?"

"What do you care?" Willy picked the slice of lemon out of his drink and offered it to Evon. "This might sweeten you up."

"Whatever!" She watched Bell put his arm around the blonde and put his mouth close to her ear. The girl laughed and leant against him. "You can stick that

lemon, Willy."

"Such aggression." Willy popped the lemon back into his glass. "It was a friendly offer."

Bell brushed a strand of the girl's hair back from her face and made a gesture as if drinking from a glass. Then he stood up and came back to the bar. He'd taken off the eye patch.

"What's the girl's name?" Willy asked. "Has she got a sister? A cousin? A distant relative?"

"It's Charlotte. She's a Capricorn and she's on her own. Sorry, mate." He took out his Armani wallet. "You'll have to find your own."

"Where's Frederick?" Willy shouted. "Haven't seen him in ages."

"Frederick went to the head," Bell yelled back. "Go see if he's okay. He was three sheets to the wind. All ballast overboard. Mainsail spliced. Completely lost his sea legs." Evon noted that the girl was now wearing the eye patch. "Oh, here he comes. He's back from Davy's Locker." Bell ordered five drinks, put the cider in front of Evon and the two beers in front of Willy, and took the other two over to the blonde. They settled into a corner together.

"Say, Frederick," Willy said. "Were you always blind?" He pushed one of the beers over to him. "Bell bought you another beer."

Frederick leant close to Willy and Evon. His eyes, as always, were hidden behind dark glasses. With his red hair and freckled face, he looked boyish and very Australian. "No, mate. I lost my sight when I was six. My sister got me with a

catapult. It hit me in the right eye. I gradually lost the sight in my left eye as well.”
He tossed a peanut in the air and caught it in his mouth.

“Do you remember what it was like to see things?” Willy asked. “What do you remember?”

Bell returned. The blonde was dancing with a different guy. Bell leant on the bar next to Evon. “She’ll be back. We’re just at the stage where she wants to show me she’s not all that keen. She’s trying to make me jealous.”

“So, I guess you’re here, trying to make her jealous,” Evon said.

Bell pulled Evon into a bear hug. “Actually, I’m just using her as an excuse to crack onto you.” He laughed and released Evon. “Sorry, Vonny.”

“Evon!” Evon said. “Call me ‘Evon’”.

“I remember the colour of the sea,” Frederick said. “Blue. Whenever I think something looks nice, I imagine it’s blue.”

Bell tucked the eye patch into his pocket. “So, you like the colour blue, Frederick?”

“It’s the only colour I know.”

“My eyes are blue,” Willy said. “Evon’s are brown, though. Mud brown. Maybe chocolate brown. They’re quite a lot like Maltesers.”

“Oh, cool. Maltesers taste good.” Frederick looked a little sad. “So, that’s pretty funny, really. About Bell, I mean. Bell is blue.”

“What?” Evon said. “Are you really pissed or something?”

"He's a bluebell." Frederick grinned. "It's a weak joke. I've heard you guys messing around with each other's names in the office."

"Bell doesn't look nice," Evon said. "He looks like a wild man of the forest who's been let loose in a shop that only stocks Armani and hippy gear."

"I look nice," Bell said. "So do you. We all look nice."

Willy laughed. "Yeah, right. If you find lanky vampires attractive, then Evon is Miss Vampire of 2012."

"I bear no resemblance to a vampire." Evon felt the strangest urge to giggle. No doubt, exhaustion and stress were affecting her.

"Let me see," Willy said. "Black hair. White skin. Underweight. Bony face. Pointy incisors. Red puffy lips. Yep, definitely vampiric. You should wear more black to emphasise that."

"I prefer white."

"How come you can describe her when you have face blindness?" Frederick asked.

"I can describe her. I just can't recognise her." He winked at Evon. "Hey, how about a dance?"

"Not a chance, Goldilocks."

Bell waved at the blonde girl and danced his way over to her doing a wild version of the horn pipe.

"Blah, I'm going home," Evon said. "It's late."

"It's nearly three am," Willy said. "No point in going home now. Have

another drink." He leant close to Evon. "How does he do it?"

"What?"

"He pulls chicks."

"It's easy," Evon said. "You just need good looks, charm, intelligence and style."

"I got those." Willy burped. "Got heaps."

"Right. You've got heaps of something, but it ain't charm."

Bell was dancing with the girl. Her hair swung in silvery arcs as he spun her around then drew her close to his chest. Bell was a good mover. Evon imagined him as a rock star, gyrating on stage, surrounded by hip-hop girls in hot pants. The Palace was busy tonight. Usually, it was practically empty apart from a few manky regulars and immigration officers.

"Come on!" Willy said. "Let's dance!"

"Thought you hated me? Thought I was a vampire?"

"I'm desperate."

"Well, I'm not." Evon put down her cider. "Anyway, I have to go. Robert will be waiting up for me." She walked out into the cool air. The streets were fairly empty. A few wasted-looking tarts, some young couples staggering along together, an Aboriginal guy slumped against the wall. Dreaming. She waved at a taxi and it pulled over to the curb. She got into the front seat even though she'd rather have sat in the privacy of the back.

"Where to?" The driver, a middle-eastern looking guy in his forties, asked.

"Macgregor."

"Had a good night?"

Evon sighed. Why were taxi drivers talkative? "Sure."

"How come you got cuffs on your belt?"

"It's for my night job. Usually, I use the fluffy ones but they're at the cleaners." She shut her eyes. It was a rare taxi driver who would speak to someone who appeared to be asleep.

"Nice dreams," the driver said.

Chapter five

The house was dark. Evon let herself in and went into the kitchen. Turned on the light. The kitchen gleamed under the fluorescent bulbs. Immaculate white laminate, white tiles, stainless steel, palest blue Venetian blinds. There were no children's pictures on the silver door of the fridge, no school canteen menus pinned to notice boards. No detritus of life. That was the way Evon liked it.

The kitchen had recently been refurbished. It used to be seventies in style with bright orange laminate, pine veneer cupboards and a big plastic, dangling light shade shaped like half a sphere. This was the house Evon had grown up in. She'd inherited it. Now, her children would also grow up in it.

Evon poured herself a glass of water and drank it. Like all Canberra water, it tasted of chlorine and dust. It was then that she noticed the business card. It was placed in the very centre of the kitchen table and precisely positioned so that it aligned perfectly with each side of the rectangular table.

Evon picked the card up. The background was a matt black and the writing was in a gothic font, raised, red and shiny. In each corner of the card was a small silver illustration. A whip. A pair of handcuffs. A pointy-toed boot. And a sword. The

words on the card were difficult to read, the gothic font practically indecipherable.

Where had the card come from? Could Robert have left it out for her for some reason? She rubbed her fingertips over the card's embossed surface. She tilted it to the light and read: "Can you make dreams come true? Do you want more? Call us at the Calling Card." She put the card back on the table, walked slowly down towards Tess's room. Tess's room smelled of her pet mouse, Andrew. Evon heard him scuttling around in his cage. She heard the hum of the aquarium and faintly, the slightly rough breathing of her daughter, who had a cold.

Evon had first dreamed of her daughter when she was four months pregnant. The little girl had appeared in the form of a silver-grey tabby kitten, rather than as an actual child, but Evon had realised straight away that the cat was her first baby. In her dream, Evon had tried to pick up the kitten but as fluidly as mercury it had run into a drainpipe. She had knelt on the ground and called in her kindest and most reassuring voice. A voice neither comfortable nor natural. A voice that sounded like that of a soft, feminine stranger.

The sky had been visible thorough the drainpipe, a saucer-sized circle of the blue washed with pinkish gold. It was as if the pipe were a portal, leading to a perfect sunrise. A gateway that Evon would not be able to enter, for unlike Alice, she had no capacity to shrink.

The cat seemed to have disappeared. The hollow sound of the wind blowing through the pipe and the damp aroma of still water had filled Evon with a sadness that awakening failed to dispel.

It was six months later that Evon's daughter arrived in the real world but as

soon as Evon saw her tiny face, her small warm body and heard her kittenish cries, she recognised her from the dream.

Evon sat by Tess's bed. The moonlight filtered through the blinds, painting silver stripes across her daughter's face. She seemed fragile and insubstantial: her closed eyes dark smears, her tiny nose invisible, her mouth a faint pencil line on white paper. She was an unfinished sketch, incomplete and abandoned. She gave her a kiss and went back to the kitchen.

The card was still there. A black rectangle, like a tiny door into another world. But, of course, it was just a stupid tacky card from the brothel she'd raided the other night. She must have dropped it, and Robert had put it on the table for her in case it was important.

Evon picked it up again. She bent it in half and pushed it deep into the bin, under potato peelings, screwed up plastic wrap and cabbage leaves.

*

The van was parked outside The Mahal, an Indian restaurant in Belconnen. The problem with restaurants was that you couldn't dine at them after you'd raided them. Over time, there were fewer and fewer restaurants in Canberra at which Evon could eat.

Willy chewed on his fingernails, a habit that made Evon want to smack him

in the head. "So, Bell, what's the plan again?" Willy asked.

Bell didn't show any signs of irritation at having to repeat himself. "You're note taker. Evon is interviewer. I'm the warrant holder and I'm also going to help Frederick guard the entrances and exits."

They were looking for a Sri Lankan man in his thirties, an UNC who was working as a kitchen hand. Evon didn't expect too much trouble from him. In her experience, Sri Lankans usually went quietly, but you could never be sure.

"Walk carefully in the kitchen," Bell said to Willy. "The floors get really slippery. Make sure that if anyone is standing next to anything that could be used as a weapon, that you ask them to move away and get them to stand somewhere innocuous, like against a wall."

"Okay. You make it sound really risky." Willy stretched out one of the rubber gloves which compliance officers used when searching and flicked it at Frederick. Frederick deflected it with a single neat strike with his right hand. "How did you know?" Willy asked.

"I heard you stretching the glove out. I heard you breathe more heavily in anticipation of the glove hitting me in the head. I felt the movement of air as it headed towards me."

"Concentrate on what Bell's saying," Evon said. Lord, Willy had the concentration span of a caterpillar.

"Hey, there's no problem," Bell said. "Now, Willy, restaurants are a high risk environment. You have to watch out for knives, boiling water and oil, hotplates, you name it. So, be careful."

“Yes, I will be.”

They got out of the car. Frederick went around the rear of the building to secure the exit. He radioed Bell to let him know he was in position, and the rest of the team entered through the front door. Bell went straight to the manager and presented the warrant. Willy and Evon walked into the kitchen.

The kitchen was hot and steamy and smelled pleasantly of chilli and cumin. There were six people working, four women and two men. One of the men fitted the description given by the informant. He was about five feet seven, in his thirties with short hair, dark skin and of solid build. Around his neck, he wore a double strand of small colourful beads. Indian love beads. He was stirring a big steaming pot. Evon kept her eye on him.

The other man was chopping up a chicken with a small cleaver. He was about sixty with greying hair and wore glasses. She held out her badge. “My name’s Evon Carr. I’m a compliance officer with the Department of Immigration and Citizenship.” She pointed at Willy. “This is Officer Rhodes.” Bell walked in, followed by the restaurant manager. “That’s Officer Bell. We won’t be here long. We just want to check your immigration status. If you cooperate with us this should only take a few minutes.”

Bell said to the UNC. “Sir, please step away from the stove. I need to speak with you.”

The other man came over. He still held the meat cleaver. “I am the cook here. What is going on?”

Evon got on the radio. “Frederick, you can come in now. Over.” The back

door opened and Frederick appeared. He stood in front of the door with his arms crossed. With his dark glasses and big build, he did a good imitation of a bouncer guarding a nightclub's entrance.

Bell showed the warrant. "We have a warrant to enter and search this premises. As such I am now responsible for the safety of all people in this restaurant. Therefore, I need you to put down that knife. I need all of you to step away from the ovens and work benches and stand over here next to the wall." The kitchen staff did as they were asked.

"The meals will be ruined," the cook said, putting down the knife. He picked up a tea towel and wiped his hands on it. "We will make a complaint."

"I'm very sorry, sir," Bell said. "But everyone needs to show me proof of identity."

Evon checked the identity of the women. They all had Australian driver's licences and Medicare cards and base confirmed they were permanent residents. The dud was sweating and shifting from foot to foot. He was flexing his fists, pumping up. The cook was staring at him, as if trying to communicate telepathically. Evon felt that they were planning something.

Bell must have noticed because he came over and stood next to Evon. He said to the dud. "Sir, some proof of identity, please."

"My wallet is at home," the dud said. "I don't have any documents here."

"Is your name, Vajira Sabapathy?"

"No, sir. It is not."

"I believe it is, sir." Bell stood just out of arm's reach of Mr Sabapathy. "What visa do you hold?"

Willy wasn't writing notes. "Officer Rhodes!" Evon said. "Notebook!"

Willy pulled his notebook out of his bum-bag. "Sorry, sorry."

At that moment, the cook tossed his tea towel onto a gas burner. It smouldered, twisted and burst into flames. Black smoke cycloned up to the ceiling. A fire alarm started to beep and the cook made a run for the back door. Willy tried to dodge out of his way and slipped. He crashed to the ground.

"Stop!" Evon shouted. "Sir, stop!" She had no idea why the cook was bolting. It didn't seem likely that he was a dud.

The cook had reached the door. Frederick stood solidly in his way. "Stop, sir," he said. "I can't let you leave."

The cook swung a fist at Frederick who smoothly ducked and caught the cook in an arm lock. Smoke from the burning tea towel spread across the kitchen. Evon was coughing. It felt like her lungs were being ripped out with fish hooks.

Willy was back on his feet. "Oh, fuck!" he said. "That fucking hurt." He rubbed his calf.

Bell went to help Frederick. He slapped the cuffs on the cook's wrists. The tea towel was a flaming pile of contorted fabric and ash. Twisting snakes of smoke filled the kitchen.

The dud was still standing in front of Evon. He formed a fist with his right hand and rocked forward on the balls of his feet. "Sir, just relax," Evon said.

"Everything is under control." Lord, he was losing it. She needed to slow him down.

"Sir, could you please sit down on the floor with your legs crossed."

One of the women pulled a fire extinguisher off the wall and sprayed it over the tea towel. The foam whooshed out like an explosion of snow. In her peripheral vision, Evon saw the dud make a move. She felt a blow to the side of her head and fell to her knees. The dud sprinted out the other exit and was gone. Evon closed her eyes.

"Evon!" Bell's voice. "Evon, are you okay?"

Evon opened her eyes. She was half sitting, half reclining in an arm chair in an office. In the restaurant. "I'm fine." The side of her head throbbed. She touched her scalp. It was tender but there was no bleeding.

"Was I unconscious?"

"Just groggy, I think." Bell knelt down next to her. "Are you okay to walk? I'll take you to emergency."

"What happened to the dud?" She felt dizzy and sick.

"He got away," Frederick said. "Ran out the other door after he hit you. Willy had a sore leg so he didn't go after him."

"He's a fuckwit!" Evon said. "Where the hell is he?"

"I sent him home in a taxi," Bell said. "He was pretty upset."

"Where's the cook?" Evon sat up straight. The room tilted. "I think I'm going to vomit."

Frederick gave her a big metal bowl and a serviette. She realised he must have anticipated she would feel like this. "When we checked him out he was legit. He's a permanent resident. He said he hasn't paid his taxes in a few years and he was afraid we'd arrest him. He didn't seem to realise that government departments operate independently. He just panicked and made a run for it."

Evon's stomach lurched. Frederick held the bowl up to her. She pushed it away. "I'm fine."

"Let me help you up," Bell said. "We need to get someone to take a look at you. You might be concussed." He took her arm and she stood up. Her legs felt like soggy celery sticks left too long in the bottom of the fridge. Nausea grabbed her by the throat and she retched. Frederick positioned the bowl perfectly. When the spasms finished, she pushed Frederick away. "I'm okay now. I just want to go home."

She took a step and buckled at the knees.

"That's enough," Bell said. He picked her up and carried her to the van.

*

In the dream, Evon had been standing on a frozen lake. The sky arched overhead filled with cirrus clouds, so fine and threadlike, that it seemed as if a spider had cast a web over the upper atmosphere. Pale discs floated down, softly and delicately. She caught one on her hand. It was heavy for its size. She turned it over and blood dripped from her fingers. It was a shard of glass.

When she awoke and opened her eyes, it was to a room she didn't recognise. She sat up, blinking, confused. But then she remembered. The hospital had made her stay overnight. And she'd dreamed.

She had dreamed that dream a hundred times before. A thousand times.

When she was a child, she had woken up from that dream and she'd brought her hand out from under the blankets. Her fingers had been clenched, knuckles straining, tendons and veins embossed against her skin. She'd opened her fist and on her palm lay a small white disc, glittery and crystalline, perhaps one centimetre in diameter and of almost infinite thinness. It was a snowflake, like a perfect flower, pristine and sparkling.

Evon tried to remember the young Evon, a child who'd believed that dream objects could transfer from the sleeping world and survive the bright light of morning. A child who had been terrified of the consequences of her dreams.

Perhaps she'd even dreamed in utero. Evon imagined that her womb visions had been textured and warm, caressing and liquid, tinted red and subsumed in muted sounds and sensations. If she could have brought objects back from those dreams, her imaginings couldn't have differed much from her reality. There would have been no caesura between reverie and truth.

But, when she was a small child, free from the womb, things had seemed different. A gap appeared. The dream objects were transformed by their journey into reality. The objects didn't make the transition from dream to reality smoothly. Crossing the threshold changed them. Their original form was lost or distorted.

These mutated dream objects were stable and enduring. They could be kept and stored indefinitely.

At seven years old, she'd kept four dream objects in a special box, a shoe box lined in black felt and decorated with stickers, scraps of tinsel and fragments of wrapping paper. It contained two paperclips linked together that had been a silver necklace: a strawberry flavoured lolly that had been a fist-sized ruby: a crumpled tissue that had been a conch shell: and the exoskeleton of a cicada that had been a guitar.

Later, as a teenager, some objects made it through the veil of sleep intact and unchanged. However, most objects which made a smooth transition, which precipitated un-mutated, were ephemeral and fragile. Like snowflakes, they deteriorated and evaporated away. Those were called "faders". They didn't last long, just seconds.

She looked at her watch. It was ten o'clock. She should be at work. No, that was ridiculous. There was a card in the basket of flowers on a table by the side of the bed. She pulled the card out and opened it up.

Hi Evon. A haiku to make you feel better. Love from Daniel, Frederick and Willy:

Flames strike sudden blow

You embrace dark shadows

And wake to flowers

Bell had drawn a smiley face under the haiku. It didn't make her feel any better. Poetry just hurt her head. And smiley faces made her want to puke.

The door swung open. Robert stood there smiling, but his eyes looked worried and there was a crease between his eyebrows. Tess ran into the room and jumped on the bed. "Mummy! You got hit with a saucepan. Did it hurt?" She was hugging a stuffed toy, something that looked like a pineapple with eyeballs and a bow tie. Evon didn't recognise it.

"Yes," Evon said. She put her arm around Tess and kissed the top of her head. "It certainly did."

"Are you coming home soon?" Tess stared at Evon with big eyes, unblinking. "I hope you will come home."

"Of course, I will. Don't I always?"

"We miss you at home," Tess said. "Daddy says that you're too busy to play with us because you're catching duds. What does that mean?"

"Ah, nothing," Evon said.

Robert pulled a chair over to the bed. "Tess, wait outside for a second. Just sit on the chair out there where I can see you. I want to talk to Mum alone."

Tessa went out and sat outside. Evon could see her through the open door, swinging her legs and squeezing the pineapple toy.

"I'm worried," Robert said. "You could have been badly hurt. I know your work is important to you, but you have a family to think about. You need to stay safe for us. For Tess."

"I *am* safe," Evon said. "We look after each other. This was just bad luck, Robert. I was a bit careless."

"I don't know what to say." Robert picked up her hand and rubbed her fingers. "Your hand is cold."

"I know. It always is." Robert's hands were warm.

"We don't see much of you lately. I know you love your work, but ..."

"I hate my work." Evon felt like her words had sucked all the oxygen out of her lungs. She couldn't breathe in or out. Did she hate her work? Surely, she was indifferent to it. "I do hate it. It's a ridiculous job. I feel like it's killing me. It's slowly freezing me to death. I feel like I'm just black and blue with cold." She felt strangely close to crying. "I can't stand it."

Robert looked almost relieved. He kissed her fingers. "Then stop doing it. Move to a different area, go to settlement or multicultural affairs. Move to a different department. You can't walk into a Chinese restaurant without thinking that every waiter is breaching the work conditions on his student visa. You can't pass a Thai girl on the street without thinking she's a sex worker on a tourist visa. Everything's ugly to you."

Evon closed her eyes. "I'm tired. You need to go. We can talk later." She just couldn't imagine not being a compliance officer. "I was just talking rubbish," she said. "It's not killing me. I'm just being too emotional. It's the hit on the head." She managed a smile, but her lips felt stiff, as if they were made of wood. "Later. We'll talk later."

“You’ll just tell me about work, what Bell has said, what Willy has done, about duds and UNC’s and Steph’s black lipstick and God knows what...” He stopped talking. “All right. I’ll go. But, we need to work this out, Evon.” He swallowed. “I’m not sure I can keep going on like this.”

Evon said nothing. She kept her eyes closed until she heard the door close behind him. Faintly, she heard Tess’s voice: “I want to see Mummy. Why won’t she talk to me?”

Chapter six

Evon stretched out her legs. She'd been sitting outside the house for two hours. The car windows were fogged up and she and Bell were listening to an obscure radio station that had been playing something called prog rock all evening. Regular pools of light thrown by the street lighting alleviated the darkness. A patch of nasturtiums grew under one of the lights, almost unbearably green.

Nasturtiums reminded Evon of her childhood. When walking to school, she passed a house that had the plants growing in its front garden. The dew pooled on the leaves in miniature curving droplets, silver and iridescent, like glass wishing stones. Every day, she picked a leaf and carried it to school, nursing it so the drops of water wouldn't fall to the ground. When she arrived in the playground, she held the leaf to her lips and drank the icy liquid. Then she made a wish that would come true before the sun set.

Evon wondered what wishes she had made. Had she wished her Dad would come back? Had she wished for a baby brother or sister? She popped a jelly bean in her mouth and opened the blue client file that was on her lap. She flicked

through the folios. They were looking for a 27 year old woman from China, named Ms Lee, who had entered Australia two years ago on a student visa. She had commenced studying a business course at CIT but failed. As a result, she had been auto-cancelled and was now an unlawful non-citizen.

Evon had received a phone dob-in about her last week from a man with a Chinese accent. He claimed that he had been her boyfriend but that she had dumped him for an Australian man. He had given Evon the woman's address and told her that she was home most evenings after six pm. She drove a green Laser, had long hair dyed brown, was 158 cm tall and of slim build.

"Have you ever hated anyone?" Evon asked Bell.

"Yes. All the time." Bell grinned at her. "Especially people who eat all the jelly beans."

"Seriously."

"No. I've certainly disliked people but everyone has some sort of redeeming characteristic. I could only hate someone who was pure evil, unredeemable. No one is like that."

Evon sighed. Bell was so sweet and good. It was horrible.

It was now eight and there was still no sign of Ms Lee. There was no car parked outside the house and all the windows were dark. Evon was bored and a bit nauseated. She'd eaten too many jelly beans from the jumbo sized pack that Bell had stuffed in the glove box.

"Mrs Parker rang me today," Evon said. The car reeked of pine.

“Really? What’s up? How’s her spouse visa application going?” Bell chose a red jelly bean and popped it in his mouth.

“She won’t get one. Her husband left her.” Evon spotted a Christmas tree deodoriser hanging from the dash. She ripped it off. “Who put this in here? I hate these things.” She wound down the window and tossed it out.

“That’s a bit of an overreaction, isn’t it?” Bell said. “I think they smell nice. Refreshing.” He sighed. “So why did her husband leave her? What happened there?”

“He found out she used to be a sex worker. Not impressed.” Evon thought she saw a curtain twitch in the house but decided she was imagining it. “She asked me what to do.”

“What did you advise?” Bell took another jelly bean. “There’s not much available to her.”

“I told her to get a migration agent.” Actually, she’d given her quite different advice.

“Fair enough.” He paused. “You could have suggested the protection visa route.”

“Against the rules,” Evon said. “You know that.”

“Yes, I know that. Sometimes, the rules are wrong, though. Sometimes you have to think about what’s ethical rather than what’s lawful.”

“I know that.” Evon stared fixedly out the window.

Bell looked at her steadily. “Yes, I rather think you do.” He leant back and

closed his eyes. "Wake me up if something happens."

"Okay." The curtain twitched again. She glimpsed a cat sitting on the window sill. A black cat. "Why don't we go home, Bell?" She traced a pattern with her index finger on the fogged up passenger window. "Ms Lee's obviously spending the night with her Aussie bonk."

"Nah, she'll be back," Bell said. "And don't draw on the window. It makes a mess."

"You're just trying to make some extra money on overtime. It must cost a fortune to pay your phone bill."

"Yep, you're onto me." He had reclined his car seat so he was almost lying down. Even though it was dark, he was still wearing his sunglasses. "Love the overtime!"

"Some of us have a life," Evon muttered.

"Hey, be positive. You get to spend hours of quality time with your supervisor in luxury surroundings with an unlimited supply of jelly beans. And you get paid for it! I don't know what you're complaining about."

"I'd be a lot happier if you hadn't eaten all the black jelly beans!"

Bell sat up and pushed his sunglasses back. "Good lord! Did you just attempt to make a joke, Ms Carr?"

"No."

"Yes, you did!"

"I did not! I wouldn't."

“Right.” Bell looked directly at Evon. “I need to talk to you about something. About Willy.”

Evon rolled her eyes. “Please don’t.”

“He feels really bad about what happened at the restaurant. He blames himself. Maybe you could talk to him, reassure him a little.”

“He acted like an idiot. He should have chased the dud.”

“He was scared, Evon. That’s all.”

Evon felt a flush of annoyance. Her skin burnt. “He’s just stupid. Too stupid for compliance.”

“He’ll be a good officer, given time. You’ve forgotten what it was like when you start out in this job. He’s just scared stiff. We need to support him.”

Evon shrugged.

“Well, I’ll let you think about it.”

Evon didn’t want to think about. She did remember what it was like when she started out. She’d walk up to a door and not know what was behind it. She’d felt like she’d been immersed in a swirling cauldron of faces, and handcuffs, and tears, and condoms and heat and sweat. She had been afraid but she hadn’t been stupid.

A car pulled up in front of the house. A green Laser. A young woman who looked Chinese got out carrying a bag of groceries and headed for the front door. She was wearing a smock-like dress and sneakers, and was a little pudgy. She had long dark brown hair tied up in a scrunchie.

"That's good—she's alone," Bell said. "I was worried her boyfriend might be there."

"We shouldn't have come on our own." Evon slid the client file into her briefcase and looped her compliance badge through the waistband of her trousers.

"Well, we've got targets to meet and no one else was willing." Bell grabbed his torch from under the car seat. "Anyway, it's just a girl—we don't need a whole army."

"Yeah, yeah."

The woman disappeared inside the house. A light went on in the front room, throwing a yellow rectangle of light onto the footpath.

They both got out of the car and walked quietly up to the woman's door. Bell knocked, and after a moment the door opened a crack. Bell immediately slipped his foot into the opening. A woman with wide brown eyes stared out. "Yes?"

"Hello, Ms Lee?"

The girl nodded.

"My name's Officer Bell from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship and this is my colleague Officer Carr. We just need to come in for a minute to have a talk to you about your visa status."

The girl tried to slam the door shut but Bell's foot prevented it closing. Bell winced. "It's okay. We just need to talk with you." He pushed the door open and the girl stood aside. Evon followed him inside. The house was chilly and there was a faint floral smell, perhaps lavender, as if the girl had been burning an aromatherapy

candle.

“Cold night!” Bell took out his badge and showed it to the girl. “Sorry to disturb you at this time—you must be about to make dinner. Been at work, have you? Is there somewhere we can sit down?”

“I don’t know what you doing here.” The girl led them into a living room furnished with one sofa, one small table and one television set. “I just a student here in Australia. Not working or nothing.”

“Oh, okay, that’s fine.” Bell pointed to the sofa. “Can we sit down here?”

“Yes. Would you like tea?”

“Oh, no thanks. No need to bother.” Bell sat down and gestured to the girl to sit next to him. Evon stood by the door in case the girl decided to make a run for it.

“Now, then, could we please see your passport?”

“Okay. It in my bedroom.”

Evon followed the girl down the hall. “Does anyone else live here?”

“No. All on my own.” She pushed open a door and turned on the light. The bedroom was nowhere near as sparse as the living room. There was a bed with a pale pink lacy quilt. A rosy mosquito net studded with sequins shrouded the bed and the light shade was a cheap looking plastic chandelier. The girl opened a drawer on a doily-covered dresser, drew out her passport and handed it to Evon.

“Thanks,” Evon said. “Let’s go back to the living room and take a look at it.”

In the living room, Bell was leaning back comfortably on the sofa fiddling with his phone. Evon saw that he was playing a stupid game—probably “Angry

Birds". He took the passport from Evon and flipped it open to the page where there was an orange visa label. "Okay, let me just call the office for a minute. I need to check this out."

"I got visa," the girl said. "Look! I am student here."

"Yes, no worries. I just have to check the details."

"How long have you been in Australia?" Evon asked.

"Two years. I studying hard. Learning business studies. I want to get permanent residence when I finished. Open my own business. Want to sell computer software."

"Where are you studying?"

"CIT."

"How's it going, there? Are you getting good marks?"

The girl stared down at the floor. "Yes. Good marks."

"When do you graduate?"

The girl's cheeks had flushed pink and there was a tiny bead of sweat on her top lip. "Soon. Maybe one year. I don't know."

"Have you received any mail from us lately?"

The girl shook her head. "No mail. No letters."

Bell slipped his mobile into his pocket. "Ms Lee, are you aware that your visa was cancelled eight months ago?"

"No. I don't know what you mean."

“Your school tells us that you failed all your subjects in first semester. You should have received a letter from your education provider advising that if you didn’t report to immigration within 28 days then your visa would be automatically cancelled.”

“I didn’t get letter.”

“It was sent by registered post and signed for.”

“No, I don’t remember that.”

“Anyway, you didn’t report to us and as a result your visa has been cancelled. I notice that you just said to Officer Carr that you are still studying at CIT. Was that the truth?”

The girl shook her head. “I get bad marks. They say I should leave. I couldn’t go home to my parents. They would be very ashamed.”

“Okay, then. I understand.” Bell leant forward. Evon was impressed by how caring and compassionate he looked. “Look, I’m afraid I’m going to have to detain you under section 189 of the Migration Act. You’re not free to leave. You have the right to contact an interpreter, your consulate, your lawyer or migration agent. Do you wish to contact any of those?”

“No. I don’t know.”

“Do you have any medical conditions? Do you take any drugs or medication, prescription or otherwise?”

“No.” Tears ran down her face.

“Okay. You need to pack your bags and come along with us. We’re going to

take you to the detention centre. You'll have to stay there until you are either granted another visa or until we can remove you from Australia. Do you understand?"

"No, I don't want to go anywhere. I have a boyfriend here. He'll be worried."

"You can leave a message for him and I'll leave my business card. And when you get to the detention centre, you can phone him." Bell looked at Evon.
"Help her pack."

Evon followed the girl into the bedroom. "Pack up your essential items," she said. "Your friend can always bring you some things. Remember, though, you won't be able to come back here. You'll be staying at the detention centre until we can get you home."

The girl was really sobbing now. However, she had pulled a pink suitcase out from under the bed and was filling it with clothes, make up, toiletries and soft toys. She even stuck a baby's dummy, still in its package, into the bag. Evon didn't even want to think about what that was for, but she had a vague idea that young people liked to go to Rave parties and suck dummies which had been dipped in drugs.

Finally, the girl finished packing and dragged the suitcase into the living room.

Bell was still on the sofa, his legs crossed. His trouser leg had pulled up a little, and Evon saw he was wearing purple socks with black roses. "Officer Carr is going to search you now. This is just a simple pat down search. We won't ask you to remove any items of clothing. We do this to make sure you don't have any

weapons or any items on you that could cause harm to you or to us. Please stand like this.” He stood with his arms out to the side and his legs slightly apart.

The girl put down the suitcase and made no effort to emulate Bell’s stance.

Evon gave her a cursory pat down. “She’s okay.”

Ms Lee reached into her pocket. A sudden jerky movement. Evon jumped back, her heart beating hard. Ms Lee held out her hand. She held a huge wad of cash, all one hundred dollar notes. “This is all my money. Maybe \$10 000. Please, just let me go. I really do have visa.”

“You can’t bribe us,” Evon said. “So, put your money away.”

“We’ll pretend we didn’t even see it,” Bell said. “But try something like that again and we’ll call in the police.”

The drive to the detention centre took about twenty minutes. The girl sat in the back seat of the Commodore, howling and gasping for air.

“It’s okay,” Bell said. “The centre isn’t so bad. It’s just like a hotel in some ways. You’ll have your own room. You’ll be given nice food to eat. Do you have any allergies or any special requirements when it comes to food?” The girl kept on wailing. “You won’t be there long, anyway. You’ve got a valid passport. We’ll buy you a ticket tomorrow and you’ll probably be on your way home within a few days. I’m sure you’ll be happy to see your family.”

More wailing. It was annoying. It was even more annoying that Bell was oblivious to it.

"Here we are!" Evon stopped at the gates and spoke into the intercom. "Two compliance officers and a detainee." The razor wire gleamed overhead, giving the ten metre high walls a lacy look in the spotlights. The Southern Cross hung askew in the sky as if it were snagged on the wire.

The gates opened and Evon drove into the yard. A female and a male guard were waiting. The woman stubbed out a cigarette on the ground as Evon pulled up.

Bell unplugged himself and opened the door for the girl. She was curled up on the back seat like a baby. "Come on, miss," he said. "We're here."

She showed no signs of hearing but she was crying less loudly.

"Come on, don't be scared." He took her hand and she let him pull her out of the car. The female guard took her by the arm and led her off.

"We'll come back and interview her tomorrow," Bell said. "She's too upset to talk to us right now. Tell her we'll be here at 9:00 am."

"Yeah, mate."

Bell drove the car back towards Evon's home to drop her off. "Do you think she'll be okay?" Bell said.

"Of course, why shouldn't she be?"

"Because she's fucking distraught!"

Evon couldn't understand why he let himself be affected so much. Just because some girl cried her eyes out because she had to go home.

Bell sighed. "I can't believe she tried to bribe us. That's the first time, you

know.”

“For me, too.”

“Were you tempted?” Bell asked.

“No. Were you?”

“Of course not.”

Evon sighed and leant her head against the window. The glass was icy cold and stung her skin. “Why do you do this job, Bell?”

“Why do you do it?” Bell asked.

Evon shut her eyes. She was so tired. If only she were at home, in bed, wrapped up in her doona, with her back pressed against Robert’s side, fast asleep, not dreaming.

“I find you kind of interesting,” Bell said. “You’re very different to most women, I’ve known. You act like you have to be strong all the time. You don’t have to be, Evon. It’s okay to just go with the flow, just feel things, just exist, experience things, have fun.”

“This is the way I am.”

“I’m not trying to change you. I like you as you are. I just think you could be happier if you weren’t so hard on everyone and on yourself. Do you know what I’m saying?”

“No.” She had no idea what he was saying.

They sat in silence until they reached Evon’s house. “See you tomorrow,” Evon said.

"Don't you feel at all sorry for her?" Bell asked.

"Maybe a bit."

"Good." He smiled. "See you tomorrow. Get some sleep."

"Sure."

*

Evon sat in the kitchen with Robert and ate her breakfast—raisin toast and a cup of coffee. Out the window, the sky was a pale blue streaked with the striations of cloud left in the wake of aeroplanes. Apparently these white streaks were composed of tiny crystals which had condensed in the upper atmosphere. The ground was icy, too. Frost glistened on the grass and turned the foliage on the trees to glass. The weak sunlight fell onto the table, onto Robert's hand. His long fingers seemed very frail in the light, but substantial. The light on his skin reminded her of the day he'd asked her to marry him.

They'd gone for a long walk around the lake. The path had curved through a tunnel of overhanging trees draped in autumn leaves. They were bathed in amber light as they passed under the leafy roof.

They emerged into the sunlight and the path straightened out, flanked by fields. She stared at the grass. It bowed down, flattened for an instant by a gust of wind then sprang up again. "It looks like the sea."

"A deep green sea."

Evon smiled at him, surprised he knew what she meant. Perhaps, he could read her mind. Robert squinted in the bright light and she noticed the fine network of lines around his blue eyes. Smile lines.

They kept walking until the trees closed in again. Leaves spiralled down from the trees and settled on the ground like flakes of coloured paint. Evon smelled smoke from a barbecue and heard children laughing.

“If you catch a leaf you can make a wish,” she said.

Robert snatched a leaf from the air. It crackled and broke in his hand. He knelt on the ground before her and took her hand. “I wish you’d marry me.”

Evon shook her head but she didn’t mean, no. A leaf fell softly down and landed on her sleeve. She took it in her hand. “All right, then.”

She walked off the path and he followed her through the bush. The trees opened up and they stood in a clearing. She smiled at him, and as she did so the sun came out from behind a cloud and a ray of light fell on her like a spotlight. She lifted her arms and took off her hat, which she dropped to the leaf-blanketed ground. She undid her hair from its scrunchie and let it loose.

Robert glanced quickly around. “What are you doing?”

She peeled off her t-shirt and let it fall. She allowed her jeans to puddle around her ankles. Finally, she stood naked in the centre of the clearing. A breeze lifted her hair touching her neck. She tilted her face, closed her eyes against the light. Ruby red.

It was beautiful to be naked like this, outside in the sun and wind. She looked at Robert. He seemed unnaturally dressed, in his jeans, his shirt, his boots

confining his feet. She felt she belonged here, among the trees and flowers, with the gold and green grass underfoot and shadows moving over her body. The sunlight touched her face with heat and even though the wind was warm, it raised goose bumps on her skin. "Catch me," she said.

Robert took a step towards her, and as he did Evon turned and ran away, into the trees. He ran after her. She heard him stumbling through the undergrowth, plunging through branches and wattle. Evon slid through the bush, making sure she was always a breath away from being out of sight.

"Evon!" he called. "Stop!"

Evon laughed and kept running.

The ground started to slope. She ran downhill, her legs gliding, her breath quick and light. The trees seemed to part to let her pass. She ran towards a glimmer of light and emerged where a river widened into a pool, which was surrounded by smooth white ghost gums. Grass flourished in the space between the trees and the water. A small waterfall spilled brown and gold and threw rainbows.

Evon glanced behind her. Robert was not in sight, but she heard him moving through the undergrowth. She dived deep into the water, feeling it slide over her skin like honey. She swam to a block of granite and clambered onto it. Robert came out of the woods, panting, his hair stuck to his forehead. He looked around then spotted her. "Evon! You're mad!"

"I know." She felt like she would explode with laughter but she held it in. It felt like she was swallowing bubbles. Instead of laughing, she dived into the water,

emerging in front of him. She beckoned and he walked out to her, into the pool. Fully dressed.

She had waded over. Without a word, she had knelt before him, the water spreading concentric circles around her breasts.

“What are you thinking?” Robert took a sip of green tea with citrus.

“Nothing.” It seemed like she had been a different person when she was first going out with Robert. They’d spent so much time together, just talking, making love. Everything had seemed so alive, so vibrant, so warm. It was as if everything had been bathed in a golden light and that it was always summer.

“Oh. Are you sure?”

“I’m sure.”

“Have any good dreams last night?” Robert asked.

“I don’t dream anymore,” Evon said. “I’ve given it up.” The phone rang. Evon picked it up quickly so it wouldn’t wake Tess. “Yes?”

“Evon, it’s Bell. We’ve got a problem with the girl we detained last night at the detention centre. Better come to the office ASAP.”

“What’s wrong?”

“I’ll tell you when you get here. I haven’t got time right now.”

Evon sat back down and finished eating her toast.

“What was that all about?” Robert was eating muesli with yoghurt. He was trying to lose a few kilos.

"Trouble with that girl I detained last night. Bell didn't give me the details."

"What do you think happened?"

"She's probably friends with an MP or something. I'll spend all morning writing a brief."

"Do you think it could be something more serious than that?" Robert had an oat on his top lip.

"No, I doubt it." She leant over and brushed the oat off Robert's mouth. "You need a bib."

"Thanks." Robert put down his spoon. "What if she's hurt herself or worse—"

"Worse? You mean, what if she's an Australian citizen or permanent resident? It's unlikely. I saw her passport. Unless she has dual citizenship and it didn't show up in the systems. Nah! I'm sure she's a dud."

"No, I mean what if she's self harmed."

Evon stood up and put her cup and plate in the dishwasher. "Lord, I hope not!" She picked up her keys. "You can't imagine the paperwork involved."

Robert frowned at her. "Or the injustice."

Tess came into the kitchen. "Morning," Evon said. "What are you doing up so early?"

"I heard the phone," Tess said. Her hair stood up all over her head in uncontrolled tangles which she always called "Tigs" after Miss Tiggy, the hedgehog from Beatrix Potter. "Is something wrong, Mummy?"

"No, just work bugging me, as usual. Why don't you go and have some

breakfast?"

"I had a dream," Tess said. She held out her hand. There was a small feather on her palm. "This was a beautiful angel."

Evon tried to smile. "Oh, good. You should put it in your special box. With the other stuff you find."

"Yes, I will." Tess went over to show Robert. "Look, Daddy."

Evon felt vaguely nauseous. Perhaps she'd eaten her breakfast too quickly. "What do you mean you had a dream?"

"Well," Tess said slowly. "Daddy told me that when you were little, you used to have dreams, and you used to think that your dreams came true and that you could get things out of your dreams and play with them." She pressed the feather to her cheek. "Is that true, Mummy?"

"No," Evon said. "It's just a story." She attached her badge to her belt and pulled on a coat. "I'll see you both later."

She drove along Ginninderra Drive, going slowly, being careful on the slippery road. The mornings had been very cold the last few weeks and the Brindabellas had a light coating of snow.

She had not told Robert the truth. She had dreamed last night. She had dreamed that she had driven her car off a cliff. At the base of the cliff had glittered thousands of lights, a city of skyscrapers, traffic lights like coloured stars, neon lights smeared like jelly, twisting spotlights and blue and violet laser beams. She

had fallen.

She spotted a flurry of white by the side of the road. Snow? No, it was a flock of white cockatoos pecking at the ground. Big fat round sulphur-crested cockatoos, looking sleek and healthy. A few were sitting on the light poles. One was swinging from the black rubber that held the light's lens in place. Evon believed that Canberra had the most obese cockatoos in the country—they were easily as big as chickens. Whenever she saw one, she wondered what it would taste like roasted.

"You're finally here," Bell said. Today, he was wearing a pair of black trousers encrusted with about a hundred zippers. His shirt was black satin or silk and he wore a pewter Viking symbol around his neck on a thong. "We have a major problem."

"You mean apart from the problem that you're dressed like a Goth?"

"Ms Lee had a miscarriage last night at the detention centre. She's in hospital."

"Oh."

"Although, you haven't asked, you might be glad to know that she's going to be okay."

"I was speechless."

"Right, of course, you were. Not only that, she'd put in an application for a spouse visa with the Adelaide office, so she is actually the holder of a bridging A

visa.” This was a temporary visa given to someone whose substantive visa was being processed.

“What do you mean? There was nothing on the system or on file.”

“That’s because Adelaide hadn’t put her on the system, yet. They’ve got a huge backlog.”

“So, we just detained someone unlawfully, someone who is a visa holder and she had a miscarriage. Great!” Evon sat down in her chair. “Great!”

“You need to write a brief straight away and send it to National Office. I’m going to let National Communications know what happened.”

“Has it hit the media?”

“No. Hopefully, it won’t.”

Bell took an elastic band out of one of his zippered pockets and tied his hair back into a ponytail. “After you’ve done the brief and got it cleared, Steph wants to meet with us. She wants to talk about our targets for the month.”

The day was degenerating. Evon knew that any talk about targets was unlikely to be positive.

Willy came through the door. “Morning.” He glanced at Bell. “What’s wrong?”

“We detained a girl last night who was lawful, and she had a miscarriage.”

“Is she okay?” Will sat down at this computer. “What happened? Didn’t you know she was pregnant? Didn’t you know she had a visa?”

“She didn’t tell us,” Evon said. “We had no idea. Anyway, I’m writing a brief about it.” Evon pulled out the girl’s file. “Don’t talk to me. I’ve got to get this done

before the deadline. I've only got an hour."

"Can I do anything to help?" Willy asked.

"There's nothing you can do," Bell said. "Just make sure you take all the dob-in calls this morning and you deal with the walk-in cases, the voluntary locations."

"Yes," Will said. "I'll get coffee for everyone. Anyone want a donut?"

"No, thanks," Evon said.

"Are we still having the milk drinking competition this afternoon?" Willy asked. "I've been psyching myself up for it."

Bell's phone rang.

"I'll get it." Frederick picked it up.

"Sorry," Bell said. "Maybe tomorrow."

Frederick hung up the phone. "A dob-in," he said. "The informant said he knows of a Swedish man on an ETA who's working in breach of his no work condition, selling art outside the Woden shopping centre. The client is about 180 centimetres tall blonde hair, blue eyes, in his twenties and, I quote, 'quite handsome'. He says that he's at the shopping centre right now. Standing near the north entrance."

Evon frowned. "A Swede? Are you certain?"

Willy looked up. His bulgy blue eyes were bloodshot and he looked exhausted. The compliance life appeared to be catching up with him. "Isn't that unusual?"

“Yes, very.” Evon nodded. “I’ve never come across a Swede in breach before. They’re very well behaved like the Japanese.”

“Well, I’m sure he said Swedish, Frederick said. “What’s more, the informant had a Swedish accent himself and sounded about the same age. Must be travelling companions.” Frederick looked thoughtful. “It sounded like the informant was also at a shopping centre. I could hear a lot of background noise.”

“So, what’s the name of the person we’re looking for?”

“The informant said he didn’t know the name or birth date.”

“We don’t have the time today,” Bell said. “We have to sort out Ms Lee’s case.”

*

Steph stood in front of the whiteboard in her office, dressed in four inch heels in midnight black with small “Hello Kitties” on each toe, a big taffeta skirt that sat on her wide hips like a tutu, the usual fishnet stockings, a spider web design blouse and a dog collar. Unlike most female public servants, she eschewed the usual strands of pearls and conservative suits. Evon had a theory that you could work out the level of a female public servant by the number of strands of pearls she wore. An EL 1 wore one strand. An EL 2 wore two strands. The APS levels never wore pearls. Perhaps a black studded dog collar indicated that you were beyond the constraints of hierarchy. Maybe she wanted to be the first female immigration secretary.

The rest of the team sat around holding big blue diaries and pens. For some reason, public servants always held a diary and a pen at meetings. They only ever used them for doodling. Evon was using hers to make a check list for assessing lame wardrobe choices. Her theory was that everyone would start off with ten points. Then, she'd deduct one point for each wardrobe breach. Men would lose points for having a tie too short, trousers too short, sleeves too short, shoes that were scuffed, dog fur or any other fluff on their jackets, wearing zip-up jackets, wearing stupid socks. They'd lose three points for overall dorkiness. She assessed Frederick: "Pass". Bell passed easily. Willy was a fail. Steph couldn't be assessed.

"We're not meeting the targets, people. What's going on? We need thirty-five locations this month and we've only managed twenty three so far. There's seven days until the end of the month. What are we going to do about it?" Steph's gaze fell on Bell.

"Steph, I understand that we have targets to meet, but you can't expect us to locate unlawfully in accordance with a quota system."

Steph put her hands on her hips. Her fingernails were black acrylic perfection with small skulls. It was interesting to Evon that Steph could be a Goth. The woman was well into her forties. Surely there came a time when Goths put aside their corsets and white face paint, and became middle aged. If Steph were the typical executive, she'd be dressed quite differently, yet, her thinking was so national office, so bureaucratic, so middle class.

Evon stared at her list again. She had decided that women's fashion fails were: fake French manicure nails, skin coloured pantyhose, high heels, fake tan,

big arse, Pandora charm bracelet, pearl necklaces, tattoo on ankles and lip liner in a different colour to lipstick. Interestingly, using these criteria, Steph was a fashion success except for the big arse.

“I do expect it,” Steph said, waving her arm. “The Minister expects it. The Secretary expects it and the community expects it. We must meet the Key Performance Indicators if we’re going to get our funding. It’s as simple as that.”

“I can’t manufacture unlawful non-citizens,” Bell said.

“You don’t have to manufacture them. We have over fifty thousand unlawfully in Australia. All I’m asking is that you get yourselves out the office and find them.”

“It’s not that simple,” Bell said. “We need search warrants. We need evidence to support search warrants. We need to perform checks. We need reasonable suspicion to detain. It takes time. If you rush these things then you make mistakes.”

“Yes, like that fiasco at the Indian restaurant. Or like last night. Whose bright idea was it to detain a pregnant woman with a visa?” Steph turned to scrawl something on the whiteboard. It appeared to be a picture of a rabbit but possibly said: “preg”. Evon found herself staring at Steph’s legs. Fat was oozing out between the criss-cross fishnet of her stockings. She wore a thin silver anklet with a small enamelled redback spider.

“We didn’t know she was pregnant or lawful.”

Steph spun around to face the group. “Did you ask her?”

Bell shook his head. “We asked her the usual questions about whether she

held a visa or had any medical issues.”

“And how do you explain the fact that she is a visa holder? Why wasn’t she asked if she had a visa application in process?”

Bell sighed. “We never ask.”

“From now on you ask if they’re pregnant and you ask if they have a visa application in process. Understand?”

“Yes.”

“Good. You know, there are people clammering to be in your positions. Last time we advertised for a compliance officer position, we had over one hundred internal applications. Pretty amazing considering there are only two hundred and fifty people in this office. Maybe we need some fresh blood in the section.”

“I’m willing to swap,” Evon said. “Sitting round in Settlement or Citizenship sounds great to me!”

“Can I speak to you after the meeting, please?” Steph said. “There’s something we need to discuss.”

Willy smirked at her like a child enjoying the prospect of his sister being told off by a parent.

“Sure.” Evon kept her face blank but couldn’t help but feel anxious.

Steph clapped her hands together. “Now, I don’t want to see you all sitting around in the office all day. Any questions? Good. Get out and find people.”

When the room was empty, Steph sat down on a chair next to Evon. Evon inhaled her clove-like perfume. “What’s happening with that detainee? The one you

found at the brothel?”

“Nothing much. We can’t identify him.”

“Have you interviewed him?”

“Yes. Of course.”

“So, what do you know?” Steph glanced at her watch. Evon felt relieved. Steph was not going to be bailing her up for long.

“Nothing. He hasn’t said a single word to me. He won’t speak at all.”

“Well, keep at it. We can’t have him sitting around in detention forever or he’ll end up on *Lateline*.”

“He’s only been in the IDC for a few days. You have to have been in there for about seven years to make it onto *Lateline*.”

“Well, I want him removed. To remove him, I need to know who he is. Go back to the brothel and ask some questions. Sort it out. I want some info on this guy on my desk by COB Friday. Clear?”

“Sure.”

“Oh, and a man’s just turned up at the counter. He says he wants to apply for protection. I’m assigning him to you. He’s in the interview room.”

“Is he lawful?”

“No, he’s overstayed a business visa.”

The man, another African by the look of him, was sitting quietly sipping from a

paper cup of water. The clients were never given glasses or anything else that could be used to assault compliance officers.

"Hello, my name's Evon Carr. I'm a compliance officer. May I ask why you're here?"

"I want protection. I came here on a visa that's finished now. I can't go home to Nigeria."

"Do you have your passport?"

"No, it is stolen."

"Okay. Have you reported the theft to the police?"

"No, I am too scared to go to police." The man finished his water.

"So, do you have anything on you to confirm your identity?"

"No, nothing. All my things were stolen."

"So, nothing at home then?"

"I am living on the streets. No money to live in a house."

Evon scribbled down the conversation. "So, why did you overstay your visa?"

"I am a Catholic. In Nigeria there are many Muslims. One day the Muslims come and they burn down my brother's shop. They destroy everything. I had no job because I work in my brother's shop selling parts for cars. The Muslims were jealous because my brother making a lot of money and becoming very rich man.

"My brother ask me to help him to get revenge on the Muslims. They destroy his life. We go and we get some friends, members of our church, and we burn

down the Mosque —“

“Okay,” Evon said. “That’s very interesting. I’ll find someone else to talk to you about your protection claims.”

“Many people die in the Mosque and the Muslims are very angry with my family. They kill the wife of my brother and one of my friends from my church and they looking for me to kill me, too. I can’t go back to Nigeria because they kill me.” He stared earnestly into her eyes. “This is religious persecution!”

“Sure, I understand.” Evon scribbled a few more notes on her pad. She wasn’t interested in his bogus protection claims. The onshore protection section would deal with that aspect of the case. “How did you get the business visa?”

“My brother look on internet for an Australian company that sells car parts. We send them email asking if they would like to meet with us when we in Australia and see our catalogue. They agree. So, we ask them to email us a formal invitation to meet them. We took the invitation to the Australian embassy and they give us a visa to come here.”

Evon made a mental note to tell the investigations section about this latest scam. Not that they’d do anything about it. They had no resources to actually do any investigating. “Okay, because you don’t hold a visa to be in Australia, I have to detain you under section 189 of the Act. You’re not free to go—”

The man grinned. No doubt, he was looking forward to spending a few months in detention before being released into the community on a protection visa. Evon hoped he wouldn’t burn down anything important.

"Are you giving him a bridging visa?" Bell asked when she came out the interview room.

"No, the guards are going to pick him up in about a half hour. He's going for a ride to the detention centre."

"Are you sure he's not eligible?"

She heard a pattering sound overhead, like mice running around frantically in the roof space. "He's not." It had started to rain. Raindrops pelted against the windows, smashing themselves to oblivion against the plate glass. She went over and stood by the window and Bell followed.

Even thought of her walk to the bus. "Damn rain!"

"We need the water."

"I fail to see why that should stop me complaining about the inconvenience and discomfort of it. I have to catch a bus after work."

"It's just a sun shower." He shrugged. "You should be grateful it's raining."

"Yeah, right." Political correctness had become so out of control that even innocent comments about the weather were suspect. Damn thought police were everywhere! Mind you, Bell was positive about everything. If she'd said "Damn cyclone!" he'd probably have said the wind was good for sweeping the city clear of dust. If she'd said "Damn tsunami!" he'd have commented on how much fun it was to be able to sail a boat in your back garden.

Bell was standing so close to her that she felt his jacket touch her side. He was the type of person who always stood a bit too close. She liked his cologne. It smelled lemony, like Calvin Klein. "I bet the English don't stop work to watch the

rain.”

“It’s a novelty for us.”

“True.” Bell traced the path of a raindrop as it slid down the glass. “Perhaps the English stop work when the sun comes out from behind a cloud.”

“Don’t know.” She was thinking of all the English overstayers. One of the most common reasons they gave for overstaying their visas was that they couldn’t stand to go back to the English weather.

“I can’t wait until it’s summer, again,” Bell said. “I love the warmth. The winter seems to last forever.”

Her thoughts drifted to the Chinese girl. Had detaining her caused her miscarriage. She’d been crying so desperately in the car. Had she been in pain? “I prefer winter.”

Bell laughed. “Why do you think that is?”

Evon shrugged and moved a step away. “You know, when it started to rain, I didn’t recognise the sound.”

“That is not an answer to my question.” Bell stared at her steadily then pulled his mobile out. He glanced at the time. “Come on! I received a dob-in while you were speaking to the African guy. I’ve got some information about that Vietnamese guy we’ve been trying to find for the last two years. The one who punched out Gary.” Gary was Evon’s predecessor in the team. “Apparently someone just spotted him sitting outside the art gallery panhandling.” Bell grabbed a backpack from his work station. “Quick.”

"Shouldn't we get some other officers to come?"

"No. It'll be fine. We'll just follow the guy home and get him later with a full team. We won't try to detain him on the spot. He's too violent."

A large number of people stood around outside the gallery. It had already stopped raining and the sun had come out and was making the wet grass shine. "Lord, there's a lot of people here," Evon said. The crowd, mostly young people, were smiling at each other and taking quick glances at their watches and mobile phones. Someone was playing a guitar: Beautiful Dreamer. There were two people filming with video cameras. Tourists? Things seemed a little odd and unnatural.

Evon wiped perspiration from her forehead and scanned the crowd but saw no sign of the person of interest—a stocky Vietnamese male in his fifties who'd entered on a tourist visa and failed to leave.

A baby was screaming, its shrill wah-wah-wah reminding Evon of the miaowing of a Siamese cat. An old man was selling hotdogs from a rusty barbeque and the smell of sausages drifted on the air, reminding Evon of Sunday afternoons.

A whistle blew. Its shrill tone summoned an instant of silence.

Bell unzipped his backpack and pulled out a pillow in a purple satin pillowcase. Evon stared at him, frowning. A pillow? What the hell was going on?

Everyone in the crowd was pulling out pillows from backpacks, school bags and carry bags. Then they started hitting each other with the pillows. She was in the middle of a gigantic communal pillow fight. Someone hit her on the head with one. It was Bell. She stared at him in outrage. It wasn't fair. She was unarmed!

The whistle blew again. Perhaps only sixty seconds had passed. Everyone stuffed their pillows back into their bags.

"Just walk off. Like nothing happened." Bell grabbed Evon's arm. "Back to work." They walked back to the office. "How do you feel about that? A pillow fight in the middle of the city!"

She was surprised. Perhaps the gap between reality and dreaming was narrowing. Perhaps the pillow fighters were all dreamers. "I can't believe that just happened. Was there really a dud?"

"Ah, so sweet and naïve!" Bell laughed. "There wasn't one. I just said that to get you to come along. You wouldn't otherwise."

"What's the point?"

"It was for fun. It was one of those flash mob things. A flash pillow fight. Fun! Were you surprised?"

"Yes. I was." She suddenly realised she was laughing. Tears ran from her eyes, blurring Bell's face. He was standing really close to her now, even closer than before. For a crazy second, she wondered if he was going to kiss her. She took a step back and wiped her eyes hard with her fists. "That was extraordinary."

"See, Evon, it is possible to have fun." Bell was smiling broadly. She could see that he was very pleased that he'd made her laugh. It was a victory for him.

She took a deep breath and forced her face back to neutrality. "We don't have time for this. Let's get back."

Chapter seven

Evon was watching *Lateline*.

“I don’t know why we’ve starting watching this rubbish,” Robert said.

“Especially when we have the whole Andromeda series on DVD.”

“They often mention immigration matters.” Evon turned the sound up a little.

“I need to know what’s going on in case I have to write a brief.”

“All the more reason not to watch. It’ll just be one more thing for you to worry about and obsess over.” Robert got up. “I’m going to make some more toast. Want some?”

“A shocking revelation of yet another immigration blunder today,” the hostess said. “Mrs Parker is the mother of two young toddlers, both Australian citizens. Due to immigration ineptitude, Mrs Parker is facing deportation from Australia with no prospect of being allowed to return in the near future.”

“Mrs Parker, can you please explain why you contacted us.”

Mrs Parker didn’t look as unhealthy as when Evon had last seen her. Presumably, the TV station had performed a makeover. “Yes, I was told by an

immigration officer that I didn't have a hope of getting my visa situation sorted out unless I went to the media. The officer said that without media attention, I'd be thrown out of Australia before I knew what happened to me."

"So, can you describe your situation to us?"

"I came to Australia fifteen years ago when I was just a young girl. I was forced to work in sex industry for a long time. I eventually managed to escape and I've tried to make a decent life for myself. I married a wonderful Australian man and have two lovely children. Little girls. Both Australian. My husband just found out that I was a sex worker and he's left me. Because of this, immigration says they are going to take my children away from me and send me back to Vietnam."

"Why didn't you go to the police when you were forced into the sex industry?"

"I was too afraid I would be killed. I am still afraid."

Robert came in and sat down. He gave Evon a plate of toast with peanut butter. "Come on, let's watch a DVD."

Evon nodded. "Sure." She felt a tingle of fear crawl into her belly and settle down comfortably for the duration. Someone might lose their job over this one.

*

"Let me introduce you all to John Blakely," Steph said. "He's come over from National Office to be the team leader for the removal of Mr Dave Morrison. As you

know, Mr Morrison is a 501 cancellation with a history of extreme violence. We're planning to locate and remove Mr Morrison tomorrow afternoon." She smiled. "I'll hand you over to John."

John Blakely was at least six feet five inches and looked as if he weighed around 130 kilograms. He had a huge brutal head and over-sized nail-bitten hands. He stood and spoke with the confidence of an ex-policeman. "Morning, all," he said. "Thank you for coming."

There were about twelve people in the room. Three were police officers from the tactical response group. There was Willy, Evon, Frederick and Bell. There was an elderly officer from character, two officers from removals, and Steph.

"For those who don't know me, I'm an ex-AFP officer who's been with immigration for fifteen years. I've worked in practically every enforcement area in the department: compliance, detention, investigations and now complex removals. Now, this is not going to be an easy removal. That's why I'm here. You've all got copies of the operational orders?"

Evon nodded. The orders were huge, about twenty pages worth. No one had time to read them.

"Right, in short, Mr Morrison is a very bad man. He's violent and aggressive and he doesn't think twice about attacking police officers or anyone else who crosses him. He's been out in the community for two years now and has had time to get entrenched. He's working for a mate who has a building company. He has two children, an eleven year old and a kid who's turning one the day after tomorrow.

"Mr Morrison grew up in Australia. He thinks he is Australian. He doesn't remember England and he's never travelled back there. He's not going to be happy about us grabbing hold of him and sending him to the UK. He's got no family there. He knows nothing about the UK and he's got no mates there. He doesn't consider himself a Pom. He reckons he's an Aussie with all the rights of an Aussie. So, he's going to resist. There's going to be violence." He paused and took a sip of water. "Tomorrow is the day before Mr Morrison's kid's birthday. We've been watching his house and he hasn't gone out to the shops for anything.

"Tomorrow, Saturday, is the day after his pay day, so we're expecting him to leave the house at some point to go to the shops to buy some presents for his kid, maybe a birthday cake and other items related to the celebration. Usually, he leaves the house at ten o'clock on Saturday mornings to do some shopping. We'll follow him to the shopping centre and Officer Bell will detain him. Do it quickly, Daniel. Just say enough to make it legal. Then, when I give the signal we seize him." He waved a hand at the tactical response guys. "This is when these officers will take action. At this point you compliance officers need to keep out the way. Willy, you can be the note taker but keep back or you might get hurt. We'll take Mr Morrison direct to the airport and straight onto a flight to Sydney then to the UK. Any questions so far?"

Evon stared down at her writing pad to avoid looking at Bell. He was sure to have his usual question.

"I have a question," Bell said "What about the Convention on the Rights of the Child? This man has served his sentence and done his time. He's back in the

community making a life for himself with his family. What right have we to take him away from his wife and his children?"

Evon doodled a cube on her writing pad. She put a little man inside. A sad little man. Every single time they had to detain a 501 case, Bell would come out with the same old questions. He just couldn't accept that for a non-citizen the right to live in Australia was conditional. You had to behave or you got cancelled.

"Well, Daniel." John looked as if he had opened a gift-wrapped box and found a dog turd. "These factors have already been assessed prior to Mr Morrison's permanent residency being cancelled. In any case, the Minister cancelled this visa personally, so there's no right of appeal. Natural justice doesn't apply. Our job is to locate and effect removal not to debate public policy. Any other questions?"

"This man grew up in Australia. He came here when he was practically a baby. He's a product of Australian society and should be entitled to the same rights as an Australian. It's not his fault his parents were too slack to get him citizenship."

"He could have got citizenship as an adult," John said. "It was his choice."

"He probably had a horrible upbringing. He's led a life of crime since he was a child. I expect his immigration status was the last thing on his mind. I doubt he would even have realised that he didn't have the same rights as an Australian citizen."

"I guess he's going to find out pretty soon," Steph quipped.

The whole room dissolved into laughter.

Bell bit his lip. "This is a man's life."

Evon looked at him and their eyes met. She realised that he really cared about this anonymous Mr Morrison. He had a finely tuned sense of justice that was completely inappropriate for compliance work. "People. Our business," Evon said. "Bell's right."

The words hung in the air for a second then everyone started to laugh again. They'd assumed she was being sarcastic. Bell smiled at her, the corners of his lips barely moving, a tiny smile. He had understood.

Dave Morrison walked over the pedestrian bridge and went through the main entrance of Westfield Belconnen. Bell and Evon walked close behind him and the tactical response officers followed at a considerable distance. Mr Morrison was a solid man, wearing jeans that were slung under his bulging stomach and an ACDC T-shirt that looked thirty years old. He needed a shave and had a light scar on his chin. It was the sort of scar that young boys get when they fall off their bikes or tumble out of a tree house. His eyes were blue and looked surprisingly kindly.

The shopping centre was quite busy. The air smelled of popcorn from the nearby cinema and there were lots of families in the food hall.

Mr Morrison walked up to the Commonwealth ATM and slipped his card into the slot. Evon and Bell pretended to be waiting in line behind him. Evon bit her lip. Mr Morrison was a big man with a history of violence. She hoped this would go smoothly.

Mr Morrison's money came sliding out the slot. He pulled it free and slipped it into his wallet. "It's my son's birthday," he said to Bell. "I'm gonna get him one of them Buzz Lightyear dolls. He loves Buzz."

"Buzz is great," Bell said. "Just great."

"Hey, do you two have kids?"

Evon shook her head. "No kids."

"You should have some. They'd be good lookers!"

The tactical response guys appeared, one of them holding a Taser. "Get back!"

Evon sprinted out the way and went to stand with Willy. Bell didn't budge. He stood there at Mr Morrison's side. "Mr Morrison, come along quietly and they'll be no trouble," he said. "You need to go with these officers. You no longer have the right to remain in Australia."

Just hurry up, Evon thought. Bell's job was just to detain Mr Morrison. He should do it quickly so the client could be apprehended. Why draw it out?

"Your visa has been cancelled and you're an unlawful non-citizen. As such, I must detain you under section 189 of the —"

"Mate, I'm an Aussie. I'm just doing some shopping. Buying a present for me kid."

The TRG officer shoved Bell aside and shot Mr Morrison with the Taser.

Mr Morrison fell to the ground. Convulsed. Hit his face hard against the floor. Evon stood between him and the gathering shoppers. She held out her badge.

"Immigration. Stand clear!"

"No," Bell shouted. "He wasn't resisting. There's no need for force."

Three TRG officers knelt on Mr Morrison and wrestled his arms behind his back, handcuffed him.

"What's happening? What the fuck's happening?" Mr Morrison yelled.

John Blakely stepped forward. "You're going home to England, mate. One way trip."

"No, my family. Let me call my family. I have to tell my wife. It's my son's birthday."

"You can call her from the UK," John said. "When you get to Heathrow."

"Let him make a call," Bell said. "Let him speak to his family."

"No way," John said. "If we let him do that, we'd have all his mates on us in five minutes." John shook his head. "Officer Bell, didn't you even read the operational orders?"

The officers dragged Mr Morrison to his feet. His nose was bleeding and the blood dripped steadily onto the floor. A crowd stood around, staring. Other shoppers hurried past, their eyes averted.

"Mr Morrison," Bell said. "I'll tell her. I'll let her know what happened."

Mr Morrison spat on the floor at Bell's feet.

As the TRG officers dragged Mr Morrison away, John pulled Bell aside. "I understand how you feel about this, Daniel. This is upsetting for everyone concerned. But this bloke lost all right to live in Australia when he killed a man. It's as simple as that."

"He did his time," Bell said. "And what about his children? Don't they have a right to a father?"

"They can go and live in England, then."

Chapter eight

The guards had told Evon that they were calling the detainee “Mr Lucky”, seeing as he had been found in a brothel.

“I’ve just come to see if everything is going okay,” she said. “Are you being looked after all right?” She’d stared into her plastic cup of water. There was a faint oily film on the surface of the liquid. Rainbow swirls twisted in her cup.

The usual silence.

“We’re still trying to determine your identity. When we know who you are, we’ll be sending you home. In the meantime, is there anything I can do for you? Would you like to contact any friends? Do you want a lawyer? I just want to help.”

Mr Lucky’s deep brown, almost black eyes, creased a little at the corners. His dreadlocks spread over his shoulders luxuriantly, like lazy eels lying in the sun. Evon noticed that he had replaced the scarab bead with an elastic band.

“Perhaps you think I’m the one who needs help?” She found herself staring at the big red button on the wall. Duress Alarm. She’d never had to press it.

His silence seemed to signify agreement.

"Well, I don't." She took a small sip from the cup of water. Chlorine and dust.

Mr Lucky raised one eyebrow then slid a second bead from his dreadlocks. He held it out. It glistened in the centre of his palm, small and crystalline like a pellet of ice.

Evon hesitated then took it. It was still warm and seemed almost alive in her hand. It was a tiny glass bear.

*

Evon was eating Coco Pops. Usually, Mum didn't like Evon eating Coco Pops because they were completely made of sugar and had no goodness in them. She refused to buy them but Dad bought them instead. He was the one who usually did the shopping. But this morning, Mum had silently poured her a big bowl of Coco Pops. Mum was still wearing her dressing gown which was strange. Usually Mum was dressed and ready to go to the surgery by now.

Most times, when Evon ate her breakfast, Dad was there. He ate toast and Vegemite and sometimes he'd sing a silly song about "Happy little Vegemites." Then he would drink two cups of black coffee with no sugar and he would go to work at the office.

"Where's Dad?"

Mum said, "He's gone, sweetie."

Evon frowned. Mum's words made no sense. He couldn't have gone.

"Where did he go?" Evon looked around the kitchen. On top of the dresser, there was a photograph of Mum and Daddy getting married. Mum was wearing a white dress and had a crown on her head, and Daddy was wearing black trousers, a little white tie and a jacket. They were standing in front of the War Memorial. It was one of the many places in Canberra, including Questacon, the National Art Gallery and Floriade, that everyone had been to except Evon. Evon didn't go many places because Mum and Dad were always too busy.

"I don't know." Mum was staring at the photograph too. "He's just gone, Evon. He left."

"He can't just go." Evon couldn't breathe. "He can't just disappear!" She felt as if her chest were being crushed. "Where is he? Will he come back?"

It seemed to be hard for Mum to talk. "No."

"Where is he?"

"Gone." Mum got up. "He went."

"I want to see him." She clenched her fists. "Now!"

"I need to lie down." Mum wrapped her dressing gown tightly around herself and walked off. She always went to her bedroom when she was sad.

Evon got off her chair and tried to follow. Tears were coming out of her eyes and her nose was running. Her legs were wobbly so she sat down on the floor. The tiles were cold and icy through her pajama bottoms. Her nose dripped onto the floor. She knew she should get a tissue but her legs wouldn't work. She couldn't stand up.

Dad had disappeared and it was all Evon's fault. She had to tell Mum what had happened. She got up and went to Mum's room and opened the door. The lights were out and the curtains were drawn. Mum was lying in bed under the doona. Evon climbed on the bed. "It's my fault," she said. "I made him go away. "

Mum sat up. Her eyes were red and puffy. "It's not your fault. It's nobody's fault." She took a tissue out of the box on the bedside table and blew her nose. "He wasn't happy. He went."

"I dreamt about a bear who kissed me on the cheek. He had bristly whiskers but he was nice. The bear went in the cave. I followed him in the cave but when I got in, it was empty. The bear had disappeared. Like Dad."

"That's not why he went."

"Then why?"

Mum was crying. "I don't know!"

Evon knew it was because of her. Her dreams changed things.

Slowly, she walked to her own bedroom. She crawled under the bed and found the box where she kept the dream objects. Perhaps if she picked a really special one out and gave it to Mum, it would make her smile.

Still under the bed, she unwrapped the box from the flat beach ball. The box was a dull matt black in the shadows. She could see her name glittering faintly on the lid. One of the letters had peeled off so it looked like her name was "Eon". She lifted the lid and took out a glass marble. It was like the marbles that you could find if you opened up spray cans. Daddy had once showed her how if you cut a spray paint can in half, it had a marble inside. The marble was what made the rattling

noise when the can was shaken. The marble was a clear sea green colour and when you held it up to the light, you could see very small bubbles. In her dream, it had been an entire ocean filled with fish, bone white shells, swaying seaweed and sunlight. Now, it was glass. It was special, but was it special enough?

She looked at a hard curved spiral of orange peel. It was a bit green and fuzzy around the edges but basically okay. She'd dreamed it about three months ago. It hadn't made the transition from dream to reality very well. It had mutated a lot from its original form—a beautiful amber ball dress covered in glittering gold and green sequins and with a long, long trail. It wouldn't be enough to cheer up Mum.

A gold ring glittered at the bottom of the box. She'd only dreamed it two nights ago. It was a plain band with a tiny stamp on the inside. This was one of her best dream objects ever because it was exactly the same in the real world as it was in the dream world. She dreamed of a ring and then found a ring. It wasn't really something she wanted to give up. She picked it up and put it on her thumb. It was much too big, but it would be perfect to give to Mum.

She crept back into Mum's room and lay on the bed next to her. "I've got a present for you," she said. "I dreamed it."

Mum had a tissue pressed to her eyes and her hair was very messy. Evon felt like getting her brush and fixing it. "What is it?" Mum's voice was slow and thick.

"A real ring. I dreamed it." She held out her fist and slowly opened it, like she was unwrapping a present. The ring gleamed in the middle of her palm, lit by a stray ray of light from between the curtains.

"It's your Dad's ring," Mum said. "His wedding ring."

"No," Evon said. She used a nice, patient voice. "I dreamed it."

"It's your Dad's wedding ring. He must have taken it off and left it." Mum's voice was so quiet that Evon could barely hear it.

"I dreamed it."

"No!" Mum said. "You didn't dream it. You need to grow up, Evon. You can't dream things. You're being a stupid little baby!" She grabbed the ring and threw it hard. It pinged off the wall and fell on the floor.

Evon felt like she'd been slapped. Like Mum had punched her hard in the stomach. Vomit rose in her throat.

"Just leave me alone!" Mum's face was ugly. Her eyes were puffy and her lips were like thin white scars. "Don't ever mention your dreams to me again. Get out!"

Evon ran.

*

There was a knock on the door. Evon looked up from the bed and saw the face of the guard. "You all right, ma'am?"

"Sure," Evon said. "Why do you ask?"

"You've been there for two hours. It's a long time. Just checking everything was okay."

“I’m fine. I’ll be out in a minute.”

The guard left and Evon stood up. “I’ll come and talk again later. Maybe tomorrow.” She hesitated. “You see, when I was a child, I believed that I could bring dream objects into the real world,” Evon said. “I believed my dreams were dangerous.” She’d been in the interview room for two hours with Mr Lucky. And he hadn’t told her anything.

Chapter nine

The bus was stuffed with people but the seat next to Alex was empty as usual. Evon sat down and put her brief case on her lap.

“Hi, Mum.” There was a large canvas bag between Alex’s feet. It was filled with magazines.

“Hi, son.” She opened her brief case and pulled out a newspaper. The front page featured the latest immigration fiasco. The department had just cancelled the visa of an engineer in Brisbane. He was suspected of being a terrorist because he had a distant relative in France who’d tried to blow up an electricity station. The Australian courts had decided that the engineer was innocent but the Minister of Immigration apparently thought differently. The engineer was being removed.

“Evon,” Alex said. “I got a job today.”

“Oh, yeah. What is it?”

“Selling *Big Issue*.”

“Have you been practising?”

Alex bellowed, "Big Issue! Big Issue!"

A clump of teenage girls reeking of spray-on perfume and strawberry bubble gum giggled. Evon heard one of them mutter, "Retard!"

"Bimbo," Evon said loudly.

"Big Issue!" Alex said. "Big Issue!"

"You sound very professional," Evon said. On page two of the paper, there was an article about a doctor. He had been refused permanent residency because his wife was in a wheelchair. The woman was considered too heavy a burden on the Australian tax payer. Evon slapped the paper shut and stuffed it back into her brief case. "Do you get paid?"

"No."

"You should get a job with immigration, Alex." He'd probably do quite well sorting mail or filing. "Immigration would pay you."

"Okay. Maybe tomorrow?"

"Not tomorrow." She'd look into it.

*

"Bell, Evon! I want to talk to you now." Steph stomped into her office. She was wearing knee high boots with a strange thick mutated-looking heel and lacing up the back. They were good for stomping around in. Evon and Bell followed. "What the hell is going on?" Steph slammed her office door. "Sit down."

Bell and Evon looked at each other then sat down.

"I don't know," Bell said. "What's wrong, Steph?"

Steph sat down behind her desk. "Did you watch *Lateline*?"

"No," Evon said. It didn't do to give Steph any advantage.

"Yes," Bell said.

"I want to know who in your team told Mrs Parker that the best option for a positive visa outcome would result from her approaching the media." She picked up a black fountain pen and pointed it at Bell. "This was Evon's case, wasn't it?"

"Well, yes," Bell said. "It is."

Steph pointed her pen at Evon. Evon could see a drop of purplish-reddish ink hanging from its nib. "I find it very hard to believe that you of all people would advise a client to go to the media. Did you?"

"Of course not," Evon said.

Steph looked at Bell. "So, it was you."

"No, it wasn't." Bell stood up. "It could have been anyone, Steph. It wasn't necessarily someone in my team. It could have been someone on the counter. It could have been someone in the lift. Hell, it could have been one of those nutters on an immigration blog. Or, Mrs Parker could have been lying. It does happen."

"Daniel, you've shown over and over again that you have no idea about the department's approach to these matters. We have a duty and a legal obligation to enforce the Migration Act. We do this without embarrassing the Minister and the

government." She stabbed the pen into a note book. "Do you actually want to work in compliance, Daniel?"

"Of course, I do. I feel I can make a real difference in this area."

Wrong answer, thought Evon. Unless, he wants to be moved out.

"Well, your team needs to improve its performance. No more media leaks. No more unlawful detentions. No more women miscarrying in detention. Do you understand?"

"Those things are not under our control," Evon said. "This is enforcement. There are attendant risks to any enforcement activity. That's just something this department needs to come to terms with."

"We are not a law enforcement agency, Evon." Steph turned back to Daniel. "I want to see some risk management. I want improvement and I want the targets met. Now, both of you get out of here and do some work for once."

*

Bell handed Evon, Frederick and Willy a running sheet each. "We've only got one job tonight," he said. "We're looking for Mr Grey Cloud Drifting. "

"Cool name!" Willy sniggered. "Hey, have I told you guys my new way of thinking up passwords?"

"Yes," Evon said. "You've told me three times already." Compliance officers had access to approximately twenty five systems. Each system required a

password and they all expired at different times. It was a constant battle to keep track of the things but was a breach of security to write down the password or to tell anyone your password.

“To stop myself telling anyone my password, I use an obscene phrase. It’s easy to remember and it means that I’d never tell anyone and I’d never write it down anywhere. What do you think?”

Evon said, “You’re already aware of my opinion in regard to that.”

“Well, it works for me.” Willy examined his fingernails. Evon noted they were bitten down to the cuticles. Maybe he was scared and not just stupid. “So, what’s the brief, Bell?”

“Last week, I found a leaflet in my letterbox,” Bell said. “It was a promotional flier from a Native American gentleman, a shaman, who has come to Australia to give a special series of lessons on such topics as: Shamanic Journeying Circle, Healing Self and Earth, Dancing the Medicine Wheel and so forth.”

“What’s a shaman?” Will asked. “Is it a type of witch doctor or something?”

“Kind of,” Bell said. “It’s a guy who can connect with the spirit world. Lots of cultures have them, but mostly associated with Native American cultures, I guess.” The price of each course is \$300. He may be in breach of a visa condition if he’s on an ETA. Of course, he could be on a short stay working visa, in which case, not a problem.”

“I wouldn’t call that ‘working’” Willy said. “I mean, really. It’s not as if he’s taking jobs off Australians or anything, is it? What does it matter?”

"He's performing a function for which he is receiving remuneration," Evon said. "He's definitely working in breach."

"I think he's okay. I bet you can't find a definition of work that mentions performing magic spells."

"Try to think," Evon said. "I'll explain it to you slowly. The point is that he is holding courses and earning money. It doesn't matter what the topic of the course is."

"Well," Frederick said. "We do have a duty to enforce the migration act."

Bell nodded. "We're going to go to the address in Civic on the running sheet and attend tonight's course, which is called 'Walking through the Dream Wilderness.'"

"Great." Evon felt a prickle of sweat on her forehead. "How fascinating."

Bell's phone rang. He picked it up. "Yes. A Swede? Where? When?" Bell picked up a dob-in form. "Is he violent? What's his name? Age?" Bell hung up the phone. "Another dob-in for that Swede. Apparently, he's now outside a pub in Civic selling postcards. The informant says he'll be there for about an hour."

"We haven't got time," Willy said.

"Someone's really got it in for the Swede," Frederick said. "That's the fourth dob this week."

"Were there others?" Evon said. "I didn't know. We better deal with him or he might escalate it."

“I know.” Bell said. “But a Swede selling postcards isn’t a high priority for me. Let’s get back to the briefing. After we’ve dealt with Grey Cloud, if we have time, we’re going to that new brothel behind Rubicon. Willy received a dob-in that they’ve got some girls who have been working there for more than six months on working holiday maker visas.”

Evon shrugged. They didn’t usually bother with cases like these. Although working holiday makers weren’t permitted to work for more than six months for one employer, it was difficult to show that they had exceeded that length of time. Brothels didn’t always keep the best records. Still, it was unlikely that sex workers would take the case to the Migration Review Tribunal and Steph was obsessed with meeting the impossible targets set by National Office. “Do we know who the informant was?”

“It was the madam from Number 69.”

“Oh, her.”

“Thirdly, again, if we have time, we’re going to visit an address in Charnwood. We’ll be looking for a twenty-three year old man from Sudan. Take a look at the picture. He came here on a temporary business visa and overstayed. He’s been dobbed in by a mate who wants him to move out of his house. If we go there tonight, make sure you don’t give it away that his mate dobbed him in.”

“Okay, let’s concentrate on the shaman. Frederick will watch ... rather, he will guard the rear entry. Evon can interview. Willy, you can be note taker again. I’ll be warrant holder, obviously. Any questions, team?”

“I’m tired of being note taker,” Willy said. “How about I watch the rear door?”

Bell nodded. "I understand. But, you need to develop your capacity in that area."

"Translation." Evon said. "You are still useless at taking notes."

"I'd like to be note taker, this time," Frederick said.

Evon sighed. "And how will you do that exactly?"

"I'll take verbal notes on my tape recorder. That should be acceptable."

"You won't be able to see anything so how will you be able to know what to record?"

"I can tell a lot just by listening, Evon. You'd be surprised."

"I can just see how that would look in court," Evon said. "Blind man stated in operational notes that client strongly resembled the sound of the photograph used to identify him."

"All right, Frederick," Bell said. "We'll give it a try. Any other questions?"

"Do you think he can really do magic?" Willy said. "Voodoo?"

"There's no such thing as witchcraft, you illogical numbskull," Evon said. "You're acting like a child." She tried not to think of her own dreams, of her own childhood imaginings. Children believed all sorts of stupid things, but adults were different. They were supposed to be rational.

"You can't be certain. Things aren't always as simple as you think, Evon. The world is more complex than you give it credit for."

"No, it's not," Evon said. Had she really believed that objects could transfer from her dreams into the real world? Of course, she hadn't. In any case, she had

only been a child. Children believe in Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy, monsters, whatever.

“All right,” Bell said. “Let’s get our stuff and move out. We’ll take the van tonight. We might need the room.”

Willy tapped Frederick on the shoulder. “What do you think would give protection against a shaman? I know about crosses and vampires, and silver bullets and werewolves. What would work against a Native American magic man?”

“Dunno, mate,” Frederick said. “I don’t believe in magic. Maybe an amulet or something along those lines. Really, I have no idea. Look, just stick close to me, Willy. I’ll take care of you. We blind blokes know lots of tricks for dealing with difficult situations like these.”

The shaman was presenting his course at an ordinary-looking 1980s style house. It was well lit and there were six cars parked in its driveway and by the side of the road. As Evon watched, another car pulled up and a couple got out. The woman was dressed in a long hippy shirt, sandals and numerous silver necklaces and bracelets. The man seemed to be dressed pretty much the same way.

Evon estimated there must be at least fourteen people in the house, and they’d only brought a team of four. Not good. “Maybe we should ask the police to give us a hand,” she said to Bell.

“Nah, she’ll be sweet,” Bell said. “These people will be fine. They’re gentle people. New Age types. Anyway, we just want to have a talk with Mr Grey Cloud. “

“What’s the plan, again?” Willy said. “What’re we doing exactly, Bell?”

Evon sighed. "Were you having a nap during the briefing?" It was hard to keep up the nice, supportive role.

"We'll go in and pretend to be participants," Bell said. "That way we'll build up some evidence against him. It's best if we can see him working and collecting money. Then we'll wait until everyone leaves before we speak to him." Bell fiddled with the scrunchie that held back his hair. "Now, you all have to make sure that you act natural. Behave like people who are interested in Native American culture. Nice people." He looked at Evon. "Be friendly and smile."

"Don't I always?"

Bell smiled at her. "Always!"

They were greeted at the door by a woman in her fifties. Evon had expected she might be dressed as a squaw with a headdress and wampum beads. Instead, she was wearing a pair of sandals, cropped pants and a short sleeved T-shirt with a hideous stripy pattern. "Hi! How are youse?" she said in a broad Aussie accent.

"We're cool!" Bell said. "We're here for the course."

"Welcome!" She waved them down the hall. "First room on yer left."

The house was dimly lit. The light shades had been swathed in red tulle. A definite fire hazard. There was a strange scent pervading the hallway. "What's that delightful aroma, Freddy?"

It took Frederick a few seconds to respond. Perhaps it took him a moment to work out she was being sarcastic. "Firstly, the name is 'Frederick'. Secondly, the

aroma consists of juniper leaves, tobacco and sweet grass. Probably lingering from an earlier sweat lodge.”

“Okay, I have to ask. What’s a sweat lodge?” Willy asked. “It sounds disgusting.”

“It’s a purifying ritual where people sit in a hot, steamy tent. It’s a spiritual thing,” Bell said. “I’m not sure exactly.”

“Like a sauna?” Willy said.

“Well, sort of,” Bell replied. “But more spiritual.”

They went through the door into a surprisingly large room—a combined kitchen/family room that had been cleared of furniture. About twenty people sat in a circle on the green shag pile. In the centre of the circle, sat a man dressed in chinos and a flannel shirt. “Welcome,” he said. “I’ve been expecting you. Please make yourself comfortable.” He spoke in a soft American accent. “We’ll begin.”

Some of the people shifted around to make room. Evon sat down between Bell and Frederick. Bell was next to a hugely obese man who was breathing in a very noisy fashion. Willy sat next to Frederick, so close they appeared to be touching.

Grey Cloud Drifting smiled. “The Path of the Dreaming as a teaching is about seeing and hearing the voices of the living earth. It is about finding out who you are by listening to the voices of spirit animals and ancient ones. It is about you living your ordinary life as your vision quest, as your shamanic journey. It is about you becoming one who sees and one who heals the earth with intent. The sacred earth belongs to all peoples and needs all peoples working to heal her body.

"Each of us is given spirit gifts at birth to help us discover our path on the 'Good Red Road.' You can define your path and serve yourself and others while enjoying the trip for the journey is more important than the destination. All members of creation—animals, plants and minerals—have unique characteristics, energies and lessons giving you direction. Your path consists of the gifts of those with whom you share the Earth combined with your choices and spiritual energies."

"This is how he induces us to dream," Evon whispered to Bell. "He bores us to sleep." Usually, Bell's hair was tied back, but it was loose now. It lay in curls around his shoulders. It looked a little damp and Evon could smell the faint scent of shampoo. She realised he'd undone it to give himself a Bohemian look for the operation.

Grey Cloud Drifting stared directly at Evon. "We shall go around the circle and introduce ourselves. Tell the group why you are here tonight and what you hope to learn. And tell me about your special dream. The one dream."

"What do you mean by 'special'?" a woman asked.

"You already know that," Grey Cloud Drifting said. "We all recognise those dreams that are magical, that are transformational, that resonate. I want to know that dream so I can know you." He pointed at the fat man. "You may begin."

"My name's Dave. Hi, everyone! I'm here because I don't dream at all so it's going to be hard for me to tell you about a special dream. People always talk about dreaming but I've never had one. I just go to sleep and wake up. I want to dream like other people." He laughed. "I feel like I'm missing out on something. I was kind

of hoping that coming here would help me find out why I don't dream. I hope I might even be able to learn how to dream and be like everyone else."

"You aspire to dream," Grey Cloud Drifting said. "Dreams are gifts. Our souls have desires which are hidden and concealed. These come from the depths of the soul, not through any knowledge. The dream is divinity. We must submit to it and follow it. But, we must also beware. You can become lost in dreams. Your soul can be stolen and nothing is left. You become empty and hollow. You look as if you live but you are dead inside." He looked hard at Evon. "You."

Evon wiped perspiration from her top lip. "Me?"

"You look pale, ma'am. Are you feeling well?"

"Um ... I'm okay."

"Sometimes people feel strange when they explore their dreams. You must breathe deeply and relax. I will speak to you soon." He looked at Bell. "Tell me your dream, young man."

"My name's 'Daniel Bell'. I dream about a glass statue of a woman, a very beautiful woman. I kiss the statue and slowly, the glass transforms, turning to flesh. The woman has long black hair and white skin, a bit like Snow White." He winked at Evon. "She's very cute."

Evon glared at him. He wasn't funny.

"Now, you," the shaman said to Evon.

"My name is Evon Carr." The words seemed muffled. They sank to the floor like stones. They disappeared into the long green grass, rather, into the shag pile

carpet. "I dream." There were no more words. Her dreams could not be exposed. As the shaman had explained, they were secret and hidden.

"What do you dream?"

"Can you come back to me in a minute?" Evon's stomach felt heavy and tight. There wasn't enough air. The room was oppressive. It was dark and stuffy. She felt as if she were falling deep into the ocean, submerged in the belly of a whale, drowning in brine.

Grey Cloud Drifting smiled a little. "I think you need to speak to me. Tell me about your dream."

"I don't want to."

"You don't need to be afraid," the shaman said. His voice was rich and warm, very American. "I will keep you safe."

"There's no danger. You're just talking about dreams," Evon said, yet, her heart was beating fast. Once she had believed that dreams were very dangerous. She no longer believed in the power of dreams. Dreams were like emotions, soft, fragile and without meaning. She would not acknowledge them.

"Dreams are strong," the shaman said. "You spend half your life dreaming."

"Dreams are not strong and I never dream." Evon hoped the lie would end the interrogation. "And I don't want to. Dreams are illogical, they're empty and they're stupid. They're not worth talking about or thinking about." She crossed her arms. "End of story."

"I think dreams are the beginning of your story," the shaman said. "But, you are not ready yet to speak about your dreams. One day you will be ready and I hope that someone you love will be there for you when you are ready to speak. You must be brave." He smiled at her, his brown face creasing softly around his eyes.

"Fine," Evon said. "When I was a child, I dreamed about things. When I woke up, the things were real. I called them dream objects. I was a crazy child who thought my dreams could kill people and make them disappear. That's why I don't want to talk about it. Because I was an idiot." Evon stood up and took out her badge. She flipped it open and it gleamed a dull bronze, like a primitive knife, but it was a shield with the Australian coat of arms, and the words "Australian Government. Immigration. Compliance."

"No," Bell said. "No, Evon!"

"I'm a compliance officer from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. Under the Act, I have the right to ask anyone I suspect of not being an Australian citizen to produce proof of citizenship. Could I please see your passport immediately?"

Frederick stood up. "Er ... can I speak with you for a moment, Officer Carr?" Evon glared at him. She knew he couldn't see her expression but couldn't help herself. "Come with me, please, sir." She led the shaman out of the room into the hall. Bell and the others followed. "What visa do you hold, sir?"

"A tourist visa, ma'am. I'm enjoying the wonderful Aussie hospitality."

"You can't work on a visitor visa. I'm detaining you under section 192 because I suspect that you hold a visa that is liable for cancellation. You'll have to come back to the office with us so we can have a talk to you."

"Evon," Frederick said. "I need to speak to you for a moment."

The woman who let them in earlier came over. "What's happening? What're you doing with him? He's done nothing wrong."

"We're from immigration. We're taking Mr Grey Cloud Drifting back to the office to talk with him." Bell handed her his business card. "Here are our contact details."

"I don't understand! He's not doing anything wrong. He's Australian."

"Yes, of course he is," Evon said. "They all are."

"Actually," Frederick said. "I think —"

"Frederick and Willy, you can go home," Bell said. "Evon and I will handle this back at the office. Thank you for your work tonight."

The shaman didn't look as spooky sitting the interview room. He looked like a tired, overweight, middle-aged man who'd spent too much time in the sun. He didn't even look particularly like a Native American.

"I didn't receive any payment, Ms Carr," he said. "You know that. You didn't pay, did you?"

“You advertised the cost of the course as being \$300,” Evon said. “You’re charging for work. That’s a breach.” She saw Bell shake his head slightly. There was no way he was going to let her cancel this man.

“I advertise that to ensure that only serious-minded people attend my workshops. If I said they were free, I’d be overwhelmed. But, I never charge the fee.”

“Oh, I find that unlikely.” The cancellation pad sat on the desk in front of her, invitingly blank. She only needed a reasonable suspicion. She didn’t need much evidence to make an administrative decision.

“I don’t need payment. I’m not a poor man. I travel around the world. I’m a collector.”

“Of what?” Bell asked.

“I collect knowledge. I collect friends. I collect experiences.”

Evon rubbed her eyes. The fluorescent light flickered. It had been doing it for weeks and no one had come to fix it. Evon felt like wrenching it free from its socket and wielding it like a light saber. She closed her eyes but the flickering continued. “What do beads mean?” The words almost seemed to have come from another person. Why had she asked?

“What?” The man frowned. “What beads?”

She reached into her pocket and pulled out the bear bead. She sat it on the desk.

The shaman picked it up. “Who gave it to you?”

"A man. He wore it in his hair."

"It's an African memory bead. Sometimes they're called dream beads."

"Why are they called dream beads?"

"Well, the dream beads are memories. They represent what is imagined in your head. They make what you imagine, what you remember, what you hope, into something you can touch. At least, that is the idea of them."

Bell cleared his throat and raised an eyebrow at Evon. He must think she had gone crazy. "Well, to move on..."

"I liked your dream," the shaman said to Bell.

"What?" Bell hesitated but then seemed unable to resist responding. "What does it mean?" Bell's hair still hung loose. The sight of his face lost behind dark curls made Evon uneasy. He looked unprofessional and a little wild. Feral.

The shaman glanced at Evon. "You already know, sir." His finger traced a pattern on the desk top. A figure eight. He wore a silver and turquoise ring on his index finger. The setting resembled a flower. "You hold the answer within."

Evon raised her eyebrows. This gentleman was a complete charlatan. He knew nothing about dreams. He was playing them like an expert.

"I believe you weren't taking payment," Bell said. "There are no grounds for cancellation. But, that's not the issue at the moment. We need to see your passport or some other form of identification. We can't find you on the data base."

"What's your real name?" Evon asked. "If we can't determine your lawful status in Australia, we'll have to put you into the detention centre."

“You know my name.”

“Where’s your passport?” Evon asked.

“At the house. You didn’t give me a chance to get my stuff.”

Bell’s mobile pinged. A text message. He read it quickly then glanced at Evon and raised his eyebrows. He seemed to be trying to convey something important.

“You’re taking a trip to the detention centre,” Evon said.

“No.” Bell shook his head. “No, I don’t think so.” He laughed softly. “You’re an Aussie, aren’t you, mate?”

The man was silent for a moment then he leant back in his chair. “Yeah, you’ve got me. I pretend to be Native American because no one will listen to me otherwise. If they knew I was an Abo, no way they’d come to hear me talk. It’s just the way it is.”

“That’s fraud,” Evon said. “The police might be interested.”

“The police won’t care,” Bell said. “Nor do I. You can go home. Do you need a lift?”

“Nah, I’ve got mates in town. I’ll stay with them.” He took something out of his pocket and handed it to Bell. Bell held it on the palm of his hand. It was a small dream catcher, perhaps two centimeters in diameter, strung on a leather thong. A pendant shaped like a spider web, made of silver wire with tiny glittering beads.

“This is for you.”

“We can’t accept gifts,” Evon said. “It’s against the code of—”

"It's his," the man said. "I think he dropped it earlier."

"Thank you," Bell said. "I didn't notice I'd lost it."

"He never—" Evon gave up. What did it matter anyway? It was just a piece of junk, mass produced in China by exploited six year olds in sweat shop factories. It was probably only worth about twenty cents. It was worthless. She scribbled in her notepad "Unidentified male released from section 192 detention at 11 pm. Not unlawful."

Bell rang for a taxi. "There's going to be a wait of at least an hour. Do you want to get a drink?"

"Okay." She followed him to the lift. The immigration building was eerie at night when it was empty. "How did you know?"

"It was just intuition. Also, the way he said 'mate'. It sounded Australian."

"I think he conned you." The lift door opened. "He's not indigenous."

"I have additional proof. Frederick sent me a text. He said that Mr Grey Cloud Drifting sounded like an Australian Aboriginal putting on an American accent."

"What would he know?"

Bell stood back to let Evon in. "Face it, Evon. Grey Cloud Drifting *is* an Aboriginal, Evon. We had to release him as 'not unlawful'. The Ombudsman will be looking at this case. It might be considered an unlawful detention."

"No, it wasn't. We had reasonable suspicion."

“Just be glad I stopped you putting him into the detention centre. The media would have had a field day.”

“Steph’s going to have a field day. She warned us.”

“I’m not afraid of Steph,” Bell said. “She’s just a bureaucrat, a pen pusher.”

“She’s a gothopotamus,” Evon said.

“That’s not funny, Evon,” Bell said. “It’s cruel.”

She hated it when he was sanctimonious. “It’s funny, though.” The Palace was almost empty. Just the regulars. An unconvincing transvestite with stubble showing through too much makeup, an old man wearing a safari suit and sneakers, and a couple of old Greek men playing chess and drinking Ouzo. There were two girls in their twenties drinking at one of the corner tables, not regulars. They looked as if they’d come to the Palace by accident and were regretting it.

Evon sat at the bar and ordered a cider.

Bell ordered some sort of pale blue drink and sat next to her. “You told Mrs Parker to go to the media, didn’t you?”

Evon shrugged. “Do I look like a do-gooder to you?”

“You’re beginning to. I think you’re developing a soft side. That’s strange, really. Usually, people get harder and harder in this job. I know I have.” He took the dream catcher out of his pocket and turned it over between his fingers. The glass beads glinted. “Why do you think he gave it to me?”

“I don’t know. It seems stupid giving you that after admitting that he’s an Aboriginal. Maybe he was just playing you. I still think he’s an American.”

"That's right, Evon. Never let a fact stand in the way of a good theory." He sipped his drink. "What are dream catchers supposed to do, anyway?"

"Do I look like an expert on dreams?" She took a swig from the bottle of cider. "It's like a psychic filter, a purifier. It captures bad dreams. Protects you from nightmares."

Bell smiled. "Do you think it works?" He had a disconcerting habit of staring straight into people's eyes. Evon suspected he'd learnt it as a technique for pulling chicks.

"There might be a placebo effect." The cider bottle was already empty.

"It either works or it doesn't," Bell said.

"Well, it doesn't." Another cider appeared.

"You sound like you're speaking from experience. How do you know they don't work?"

Evon shrugged.

One of the two girls from the corner table came up to the bar. Hey," she said. "My sister said I should ask you something. Don't we know you?"

Bell shook his head. "I don't think so." To Evon's amazement, he turned his back on the girl. After a moment, the girl shrugged and went off. Bell said, "I wouldn't have thought you were the dreaming type." He tipped the pale blue liquid to and fro. "Do *you* have nightmares?"

The cider seemed to have flooded every cell of her body. She remembered that she hadn't eaten any dinner. No wonder she felt so tipsy. That might be why she'd felt so strange in the shaman's house earlier—low blood sugar.

"Tell me your nightmare."

"You heard what I told the shaman," Evon said. "I used to think my dreams came true. Now, I'm afraid that they will."

"Hey, tell me what you mean," Bell said. "I want to understand."

"I'm just talking rubbish." Evon drained the rest of the cider. "Grey Cloud Drifting, the fake shaman, the true blue Aussie Aboriginal, gave you the dream catcher to protect you from your kitsch glass woman nightmare."

Bell bit his lip. Evon could see him decide to let her change the course of the conversation. "It wasn't a nightmare," Bell said.

"Wasn't it?"

"Of course not. It was a dream about love. Everything is about love, Evon."

"You can't be as positive as you seem," Evon said. "You must be faking it."

"You pretend to be so cool and emotionless," Bell said. "I don't believe it. I don't think you do either. You feel things strongly underneath."

"Seriously, you're overestimating my emotional range."

"What's so sad is that you don't even know what you feel yourself. You're as cut off from your own emotions as you are from the emotions of everyone else."

Evon was beginning to feel irritated. She took a deep breath and then a swig of cider. What did Bell know? "What's so sad is that you have the arrogance to

presume to tell me what I feel, and that you presume to know my emotions better than I do." She slammed the cider down. "I'm not your damn reflection."

"Well," Bell said slowly. He rubbed the dream catcher as if for luck and then smiled. "At least I have a reflection, Ms Vampirella."

Evon understood he was trying to lighten things up. "I'm no vampire."

"Of course, you're not." He took out his mobile and glanced at it. "The taxi will be here soon. Hey, I'm sorry if I've upset you, Evon. I guess I don't know much about you. Not even the basics let alone how you feel and what you think. You're a mystery woman."

"There's nothing to know," Evon said. "Nothing at all. I'm not complicated." She peeled the label off her cider bottle. "What about you?"

"There's nothing much to say," Bell said. "No girlfriend at the moment. Not married, obviously. No children, though I'd like some one day. I've got one sister, called Michelle. My dad works at ANU. He teaches physics. My Mum qualified as a lawyer, sat the bar, but never practised."

"Very upper middle class." Evon tried to stick the label back on the bottle. It curled up and slid off. "I was somehow expecting something more dramatic and artistic. Perhaps a father who was a sculptor and a mother who posed nude for a famous Australian painter."

"Hey," Bell said. "Don't you know, 'boring' is the new 'interesting'".

"You're hardly boring." Was Bell flirting with her? They were complete opposites. Perhaps, he liked a challenge. She was probably the only woman in Australia who hadn't offered herself to him. More likely, he thought she needed

rescuing. What an irritating thought! She wondered if she were actually flirting with him. Surely not. She tried to save the situation. "You're just annoying."

As she stepped out and left the bar, Robert and Tess seemed insubstantial. Like faders. Like dream objects that didn't last, that just faded to nothing like cellophane whisked away in the wind.

Chapter ten

The interview room at the detention centre seemed smaller than ever. The bland white walls, the faded posters and the curling lino all seemed designed to encourage despair. The whole environment sent the message: "Go home! You're not welcome here." Mr Lucky leant forward. He rested his elbows on the table and his chin on his hands and looked at Evon with an expression that betrayed nothing. Nevertheless, Evon thought he was interested in what she was saying.

"My boss says I have to find out who you are. Otherwise you'll be stuck here forever. We can't send you home if we don't know who you are and we can't let you out. Are you ready to talk to me?"

Evon didn't even wait for him to reply. She held a bead in her palm, so tightly it hurt. "I'm going to do everything I can to send you home," Evon said. "What do you think of that?"

He just smiled. It occurred to Evon that he didn't show much in the way of emotion. Certainly, he showed none of the negative ones. Perhaps he was like Bell, completely unable to hate.

*

Every morning Evon and her Mum went for a walk to Kippax to buy the newspaper and a few groceries. They walked along the maze of cycle paths that crisscrossed the creeks of Macgregor and talked. Evon wrapped her scarf more securely around her neck. An icy wind was blowing off the Brindabellas and chilling her even through her thermal underwear, shirt, jumper, scarf, gloves, wooly hat and long duffel coat. It was a frosty morning and the trees, which only last year had been flaming like torches in the bushfires, were glazed with ice. The sun was low in the sky and cast a pale apricot light over the landscape, gilding the frost.

"I need to stop dreaming," Evon said. "Is it possible?"

"Not really." Evon's Mum was only lightly dressed in jeans and a long sleeve t-shirt. Her hair blew free in the wind and she didn't bother wearing a scarf or gloves. She never felt the cold. "The only way would be to monitor your sleep and wake you up every time that you entered REM sleep. You'd probably end up insane."

"What if I just stop sleeping, then?"

"You can't stop sleeping. People who are sleep deprived suffer hallucinations. Lab animals that are sleep deprived die. Even mild sleep deprivation can affect people. It can stop people reacting appropriately to emotional stimuli, for example."

"Oh, how do you know that?"

“There was a study by the Harvard Medical School.”

“Oh. Okay.”

The wind shifted and a cobweb of drizzle dampened Evon’s face. “So, basically, I have to sleep and I have to dream. No other options.”

“Yes. What’s wrong with that? People like to dream.”

“My dreams are different. You know that.” Actually, Evon hadn’t mentioned her dreams to Mum in a long time. Not since her Dad went away, six years ago, when she was just a baby, ten years old. For a long time, she had woken up every morning, hoping that he had come back to her. Every night, she had tried to dream him home. But, it didn’t work. She couldn’t control her dreams. She had made him go but she couldn’t make him come back. She was like a failed magician who makes his beautiful assistant disappear into a box but can’t make her reappear. “I’m not normal. I’m really not.”

“Yes, you are.” Mum put her arm around Evon’s waist. “Really, you are perfectly normal, sweetie.”

Evon stopped on the bridge and stared down at the water. She could feel Mum’s hand through her jumper, warm and firm. She felt like crying but didn’t want Mum to notice. Instead, she blinked hard and stared down at the stream. It flowed sluggishly over greasy-looking rocks. An upside-down shopping trolley lay on its side in the water. It was crammed with rubbish, old plastic bags, cigarette packets, fast food wrapping. It was acting as a filter for the stream, separating out the flotsam. She suspected Mum was about to give her the lecture about teenagers and their moods and how all teenagers felt they were different and didn’t fit in.

"Are you having nightmares?"

"No. Not really." Spinning snowflakes cutting her to shreds. Blood on ice.
Blood on snow.

"What do you dream about?"

"Nothing really." By now she had invented a nomenclature and simple rules for her dreaming. There were the dreams that produced concrete objects that endured—solidus dreams. There were dreams that produced objects that faded away—fader dreams. There were dreams that produced dream objects that were different, yet related to, the object dreamed about—mutoid dreams. There were dreams that produced dream objects that were the same as the object dreamed about—exacto dreams. Mutoid dream objects tended to be solidus. Exacto dream objects tended to be faders. "Just the usual things." She sighed. "Falling. Being naked at school. Teeth falling out."

"And those things disturb you so much that you think there's something wrong with you?"

"I don't know!" Evon pulled free from Mum's arm and stamped along the pathway. "I just hate dreaming."

Mum kept pace with her. "What if you could control your dreams? Would that be better?"

"I have no idea what you mean, Mum." Evon accidentally stamped on a large ant and felt a twinge of guilt. She didn't like to squash things unnecessarily.

"Have you heard of lucid dreaming?"

“Yes. I guess so.”

“What is it then?”

This was something that really irritated Evon about Mum. She was always testing people. “When you know you’re dreaming.”

“Pretty much. People who are able to dream lucidly say that they can control what happens in their dreams. So, if they are falling, for example, they can consciously grow a pair of wings. Or if their teeth are dropping out then they can dream they’re going to the dentist to get them fixed.”

“Oh, that sounds useful.” It really did. If she could control her dreams then her problems would be solved. “How do you learn to do it?”

“I really don’t know.”

“You don’t know?” It was very rare for Mum to not know something. “Are you sure you don’t know?” They were crossing another bridge. Evon called this one “Bug Bridge” because in summer, there were always clouds of midges hovering over it. There weren’t any bugs today, though. It was much too cold.

“No one knows.” Mum stopped and leant against the railing.

Evon leant next to her. She picked flakes of wood off the railing on the bridge and flicked them into the water. They fell slowly, sank, then resurfaced. Briskly, the splinters orientated themselves in the stream and sailed away—miniature boats.

“The Native Americans believe that bad dreams can be filtered using dream catchers,” Mum said. “I’ll get you one.”

At bedtime, Mum had given Evon a kiss and handed her a big plastic bag with a Hot Dollar shop logo on it. "Evon, I bought you something."

"Oh! Thank you!" Mum didn't buy presents often.

Evon opened up the bag and pulled out a round thing. It was large, about twenty centimeters around, and it was decorated with faux turquoise and silver tone beads. A small sticker on its rim read "Made in China."

"What is it?"

Mum reached out and quickly peeled off the sticker. "A dream catcher! Like the Native American's make."

"Oh, it's great!" Evon rushed off and hung the dream catcher at her window. She lay in bed and watched it slowly spin to the right until it hit the glass, then it spun to the left, and back. Her eyes swam out of focus and she closed her eyes.

That night she dreamt of snowflakes again. They spun through the air like tiny cogs from a dismembered clock. They flew at her face, stinging her skin and drawing blood.

She woke up. In the moonlight, the dream catcher glowed an eerie green against the dark square of the window. The plastic frame was painted with fluorescent paint. The dream catcher looked like a pale cobweb waiting to capture nightmares like juicy flies. But it hadn't caught her nightmare.

Evon decided that she had to learn how to dream lucidly. There had to be a way.

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Evon opened her hand and looked at the bead Mr Lucky had given her. It was a simple blue bead, made of turquoise.

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Mr Tran was a twenty-five year old from Vietnam. He lay in a hospital bed, slightly propped up and surrounded by machines. His eyes were closed.

“Can he speak?” Bell asked.

Dr Frances shook his head. “He’s completely paralysed. He’s suffered a stroke which has caused him to be affected by what we call locked-in syndrome. This basically means he has complete paralysis of voluntary muscles in all parts of his body except for those that control eye movement. He’s conscious and has cognitive function, but he’s unable to speak or move. He’s completely mute and paralysed.”

“Isn’t he young to have a stroke?” Willy asked. “He’s not even thirty.”

“Poor guy,” Bell said. “I really feel for him.”

Evon looked around at the room. It was bare of flowers, cards, any indication that Mr Tran had any friends or family.

“Let’s talk outside.” Dr Frances led them out into the corridor and shut the door behind them. “It was probably caused by a drug overdose. We found a large amount of narcotic substances in his blood.”

Mr Tran had been discovered lying unconscious in the dirt at a tomato farm. An anonymous caller had rung an ambulance. The hospital had found his personal details in his wallet and rung immigration to check his status. He had arrived in Australia on a visitor visa which had expired six months earlier.

"What's his prognosis?" Bell asked.

"Well, there's no cure for locked-in syndrome. And there isn't a standard course of treatment. Functional neuromuscular stimulation may help activate some paralysed muscles. Several devices to help communication are available. Other treatment is symptomatic and supportive. Basically, the prognosis is poor. The majority of patients don't regain function."

"So, he won't live for long," Evon said.

"To the contrary," Dr Frances said. "Given the appropriate medical support, and I'm talking top quality medical treatment, he could live a normal life span."

"I see." Bell said. "Does he have family?"

"In Vietnam," the doctor said. "I phoned his sister yesterday. She said they have no money at all. They can't pay for him to stay in hospital for more than a few days. She said that if he's sent back to Vietnam, she would look after him at home."

"How long could he survive in those conditions?" Bell asked.

"Not long. An infection or a blockage in his tracheotomy would kill him." Dr Frances glanced at his watch. "He nearly died the day before yesterday because the mucous around the tracheotomy hardened. It's a constant concern. He needs to be monitored at all times."

Evon leaned against the wall. "So, is he fit to travel?"

Willy snorted. "Right! He's completely paralysed and Evon wants to know if he can fly?"

"With the appropriate support, he could be able to fly." Dr Frances ticked off points on his fingers. "He'd need full life support. He'd need to be accompanied by a doctor with expertise in anaesthesiology and airways. He'd need a similarly qualified nurse. We could handle it like a medical evacuation. The risk can be managed."

"Oh," Willy said. "I see."

"We're eager to discharge Mr Tran," the doctor said. "He's taken up resources that really should be dedicated to Australians."

"And what happens when he gets to Vietnam?" Frederick asked.

"We'd probably pay for a week in hospital. Then he'd go home and die," Evon said. "Which is exactly what would have happened to him if he'd suffered this ailment while in Vietnam." Again, she saw the face of the crying Chinese girl. Her baby had died. Was it Evon's fault? No. It was just life. It would have happened anyway.

"Can we talk to him?" Bell asked. "I'd like to ask him a few questions if he's up to it."

"Certainly," the doctor led them back into the hospital room. "He can blink twice for yes and once for no."

Bell went up to Mr Tran and sat by the side of his bed. "My name's Daniel Bell," he said. "I'm an officer with the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. These officers are Evon Carr and Frederick Mason. I'm sorry to see you're so unwell."

From habit, Evon found herself standing at the door as if to prevent Mr Tran from absconding. She looked at him. He lay completely inert. He wasn't going anywhere.

"Can you understand me?" Bell asked.

Mr Tran blinked 'yes.'

"Mr Tran, you don't have a visa to be in Australia. Therefore, I am detaining you under section 189 of the Act." Bell hesitated for a second. Evon realised he was a bit thrown because he'd decided to omit the part that read: "You are not free to go."

"Do you wish to contact a lawyer, migration agent, your consulate or an interpreter?" Again, a pause, as Bell didn't bother to ask if Mr Tran had any medical conditions.

Mr Tran blinked, "No".

"I think Doctor Frances has mentioned to you that he's spoken to your sister. She's quite eager for you to go home so she can take care of you. Do you want to go home?"

Mr Tran blinked, "No".

“Well, sir, you have no visa to stay here,” Bell said. “I’m afraid you’ve really no alternative.”

Dr Frances cleared his throat. “Also, we need to discharge you as soon as possible. You have no funds to pay for your stay here.”

Mr Tran closed his eyes. No doubt he was visualizing being tossed out onto the streets of Canberra with no family to look after him. He probably didn’t realise that the hospital would only discharge him if he were returning to Vietnam.

“We’ll talk again, later,” Bell said.

Mr Tran was blinking over and over again.

“What is it?” Bell pulled a face, obviously realising he had asked a question that couldn’t be responded to with “yes” or “no”. “Do you want to stay in Australia?”

“Yes. Yes. Yes.”

“Your sister wants you to come home. She’ll look after you.”

“No.”

Bell’s eyes met Evon’s. For once, she didn’t know what to say.

Chapter eleven

Evon sat in the car while Willy went up to *The Calling Card* and knocked on the door. In the daylight, the house looked quite respectable. It was a grey stone building with a nice wrought iron fence—she thought, it looked a bit like the embassy of a third rate country.

Two gum trees grew in the garden, their leaves shivering and casting delicate shadows on the stonework. All the windows were curtained and had ornate bars, shaped like spears. A lattice with wisteria criss-crossed the walls.

An old man was shoveling soil from a wheelbarrow onto the flower beds edging the pathway to the front door. His spade made a regular soughing sound and an occasional scrape as it clashed with a stone or one of the terracotta tiles bordering the bed. The flowers themselves were jagged sticks—the roses long since fallen, the petals blown away.

The old man stopped shoveling and turned to watch her, leaning on his shovel, a cigarette stuck to his bottom lip. She couldn't meet his eye.

It was about four in the afternoon—not the usual time for immigration to visit a brothel. Even from a distance, Willy looked nervous. He was shifting his weight from foot to foot and kept looking around. Still, men often looked shifty when going to visit sex workers so there was nothing suspicious in that.

Evon had given him a thorough brief. Basically, he was to keep his mouth shut and do what he was told. Their mission today was just to gather information for a later operation.

The brothel door opened. Evon got out of the car and ran up to Willy. She was pleased to see he'd managed to put his foot in the door, preventing it from being shut in their faces. "We're from immigration," Evon said to the madam. She wore pale pink lipstick and had outlined her lips in red, giving her a clownish look. "My name's Officer Carr and this is Officer Rhodes. We just want to have a talk."

"Do you have a warrant?"

"I don't need a warrant just to talk to you," Evon said. "Can we come in?" She needed an invitation to enter lawfully. Funny! Maybe she was a vampire.

"Not without a warrant."

"I can get a warrant in about twenty minutes. But when I come back it will be with an entire immigration compliance team, with Centrelink, the ATO and the police. It will probably take us three or four hours to go through your whole place. It'll disrupt your business. Or, you could let us in and we'll chat for a few minutes and get on our way." Immigration was unique in that it could approve its own search warrants. Much better than the police 3E warrant which required actual evidence and the approval of a magistrate.

“Didn’t you cause enough trouble the last time you were here?” The woman moved back from the door allowing Willy and Evon entry. “You took away one of our best workers.”

“I’m sorry if we inconvenienced you.” Evon followed the woman into the reception room. Two women were sitting on a sofa. One, probably Australian, was reading a magazine and the other one, who looked as if she might be Thai, was eating a hamburger. “Can we sit down?”

“If you like.” The woman sat on a stool, a fluffy one similar to the ones in the bedrooms, and lit up a cigarette. “What do you want?”

“I want some information about the man and woman we located here last week. Tell me what you know and I promise you, we won’t be visiting for a while.”

“What man?”

Evon leant forward. “You know who I’m talking about. Don’t mess me around. You don’t want us visiting you every weekend.”

“Yeah, yeah, okay, I know. You took them away. That pisses me off.”

Evon shrugged. “Why can’t you people just make sure that you employ people who have a right to work? Is it really that hard?”

“Why can’t the Department of Immigration give business visas to sex workers? That would solve all our problems.”

“I’m not responsible for governmental policy or the conservative views of the general public. Talk to your local MP about it.”

The madam laughed. “I’ll do that.”

Evon noticed that Willy was staring hard at the girl who was eating the hamburger. Probably because she was wearing a sheer negligee and no underwear. She'd dropped a dollop of mustard down the front of her outfit and was rubbing at it with a piece of tissue.

"So, what do you wanna know?" the madam asked.

"The man's name at least."

"We call him Raven. That's all I know. I think he's African but, in case you haven't noticed, he don't talk much!"

"Is Raven his real name?" Evon felt like an idiot. Of course, it wasn't.

"I dunno. Sure, doesn't sound like it." The madam stood up. "Is that all you want? I've got things to do."

"What's his connection with Rose? Are they friends? Related?"

"I dunno. They arrived together, though."

Willy pointed at the Thai girl. His finger shook slightly. "Is she working?"

Evon frowned. What the hell was he doing? She'd told him they were just here to try to get some information not to detain anyone at this stage. They didn't even have a search warrant. "Leave her alone, Officer Rhodes," Evon said. "We're just here to talk. Nothing else."

"No, she doesn't work here," the madam said. "She's just eating her lunch."

"What's your name?" Willy asked the girl.

She licked sauce from her top lip. "Tulip"

“Your real name! Show me your passport, Miss.” The girl nodded and jumped up. She came back with a Thai passport and handed it to Willy. “Aha,” he said. “She’s on a visitor visa.”

Damn Willy! Her objective was to get information about Mr Lucky, now known as “Raven”, not to mess around with visa cancellations. Why did he have to pick this particular time to act like a real immigration officer? “It doesn’t matter,” Evon said. “Come on, we’re leaving.”

“I not working,” the girl said. “Just eating lunch.”

“You’re dressed for work,” Willy said to the girl. “Or do you usually go around dressed only in your night dress?”

“I not working. Just tired. Going to have a sleep soon. This my friend’s place. I don’t work. Just on holiday. See Parliament House. Go to beach.”

“You’re detained!” Willy said. He was practically shouting. “Detained!” Sweat stood on his forehead, glittering in the light from the window.

Evon was annoyed to see that he hadn’t even learnt what power to use. He had no idea how to detain someone. “No, you’re not,” Evon said. “You’re definitely not detained. Willy, we’re leaving, right now!”

The girl turned pink. “Not detained! You stupid man. I can’t work!” She reached between her legs and drew out an object. “See! No work! Got period!” With a flick of her wrist, she tossed the object at Willy. A tampon. It struck Willy wetly in the middle of the forehead.

The madam and the other girl started to giggle. Then to laugh.

Willy got up and ran out of the room. Evon heard the car door slam.

"I doubt that would stop you working," Evon said.

"He too dumb to know that," the girl said. "Girls have many holes."

"Yes. Of course." Evon stood up. "Anyway, as I said, you're not detained.

That's not why I came here. Officer Rhodes just got carried away. He's new."

"Good. I got no time to be locked up. I busy lady. Got lots of sightseeing to do."

The madam stubbed her cigarette out in an ashtray shaped like a map of Australia. She rubbed the stub firmly into Canberra. "Bye bye! I guess we won't be seeing you in a while."

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"She threw a tampon in my face." Willy lowered his voice. "A used one. A fucking used tampon." He slammed his fist onto his desk. "I'm sorry, I just don't expect to have to put up with this sort of crap in the public service. It's just unbelievable. We should report her to the police. She assaulted me. "

Evon concentrated on her typing. She was writing up an incident report to cover the "assault" on Willy. She felt a lot like laughing. "Police won't care," she said. "You know that. Anyway, it will be amusing when you try to identify the perpetrator and all you can say is that she was wearing a negligee and no undies."

"You were there. You can describe her."

“Nah, I didn’t pay any attention to what she looked like. Sorry.”

Willy glared at her. “Why didn’t you detain her? She was in breach!” He looked like he was about to burst into tears.

“You heard what she said, she couldn’t work in her condition.”

Steph slammed her office door open. “Is there a problem?”

“No, everything’s fine,” Evon said. “We’re just engaging in a vigorous discussion.”

“Well, do it quietly.” Steph shut her door.

Bell walked over and sat at his work station. He was holding a latte in his favourite mug decorated with religious symbols from around the world. “Hey, Willy, you okay?”

“No, I’m not. A sex worker just tossed a tampon in my face. A used tampon. I’m a public servant. I can’t be treated like this. Think of the OH&S risk. I could get AIDS, hepatitis, anything!”

Bell put his cup down carefully on a “People. Our business” drink coaster. “Have you let Steph know?”

“I don’t want her to know. If it gets out, I’ll be a laughing stock. I’ll always be known as the officer who got assaulted with a tampon.”

“Willy, there’s nothing to be ashamed of. You need to go to your GP and get a medical check up, and I’ll give you the number for the department’s free counseling service. Do you want to report this to the police?”

“No, I don’t think so.”

"Mate, you must be feeling awful. You want to take the rest of the afternoon off?"

"Nah, I'm okay." Willy was looking happier now. "I'm just scared. I could catch anything."

"Okay, but we'll have to let Comcare know. Are you comfortable with that?"

"Yes. But no one else." Willy scowled. "I suppose you think it's pretty funny!"

"Nah, not funny," Bell said. "It's pretty bad. Still, it's over now. Hey, do you want to have that milk drinking competition now?"

Willy nodded.

Evon finished her report and sent it to the printer. "Well, count me out of the competition. The donut eating tournament last month was too much for me. I'm not going down that route again."

Bell's phone rang. "Welcome to immigration compliance. This is Daniel Bell speaking."

Immigration officers weren't allowed to answer the phone by saying "Good morning" or "Good afternoon". National Office had issued a minute saying that in the interests of cultural diversity any phrases which indicated the time of day should not be used. This was based on the concept that the department should not assume that callers were from the same time zone.

Bell hung up. "Okay, Evon and Frederick, you need to come with me. A woman from Albania, a Mirjeta Bizi, wants to talk to us about her options. She says

she's in a tricky situation immigration-wise. She's lawful, though. We just need to go and talk with her. Evon, check her out on the systems first."

"Bring the cuffs," Evon said. "This could be messy."

Bell's phone rang and Evon picked up. A man with a Swedish accent spoke: "I am very tired of ringing you and no one helps me. I have to tell you again that there is a man, a Swedish man, who is working in Australia on a visitor visa."

"What's his name?"

"I do not know that. All I know is that he is standing outside the big cafe in Gold Creek Village and he is working. He is now selling fruit. I am very tired of telling immigration this information. I am thinking I need to speak to your boss or to the Minister."

"We'll get on to it," Evon said. "Thank you for your call." She looked at Bell.

"After the Albanian," he said. "I just can't imagine cancelling a Swede."

Bell drove the van. He chunked a client file at Willy. "It's about a half hour drive. I want you to quickly read her file. When we get to the location, we'll park around the corner and you give me a précis of the Albanian's situation."

"Yeah, okay."

Evon watched Willy fumble the file open. He licked his lips and flicked through the folios quickly. "Is there a photo?" she asked.

"I dunno. I'll let you know. Just give me a second." He held the open file out to her. Evon examined the passport photograph of a dark-haired woman.

"What does she look like?" Frederick asked.

"Pretty. Dark hair. Olive skin. Brown almond shaped eyes. Small pointy nose. Puffy lips. Anxious expression," Evon said. "Is that enough for you to go on?"

"More than enough."

Willy took the file back and turned to Frederick. "You know what happened to me today?"

"You got smashed with a tampon," Frederick said. "Not nice."

"How did you know?" Willy glared around at Bell and Evon. "Have people been talking about it?"

"They surely have," Frederick said. "Someone left a report on the printer. Everyone's been passing it around. Why? Was it a secret?"

"Evon!" Willy leant close to Evon. "What the fuck? You did that on purpose!"

"No I didn't."

"Enough bickering." Bell pulled over to the side of the road. "Right, Willy. Tell me what I need to know about this chick."

"Well, her name is Mirjeta Bizi. She entered Australia on a spouse visa last year, sponsored by a young Aussie bloke. She's from Albania. She's thirty-five. That's all we have."

"That will do to start with."

Mrs Bizi sat on a sofa surrounded by relatives, her three Australian citizen sisters and their husbands and several children.

“How can we help you?” Bell asked.

Mrs Bizi immediately burst into tears. One of her sisters, obviously pregnant and with a two year old on her lap, said: “Mirjeta is married to an Australian boy. His parents are from Albania but he was born here. Our father arranged the marriage and sent Mirjeta over. He paid for her to come here. Mirjeta married this boy but there’s something wrong with him. He’s not well in the head. And Mirjeta, she’s a very smart girl. Cleverest of all the sisters and now she stuck with a man with a problem with his brain.”

Mrs Bizi blew her nose. “He has a condition. Autism. His mother has been looking after him for so many years. Now she is sick with cancer and is going to die. She wants me to look after her son. That’s why she paid my father so much money to arrange this marriage. No one told me that this boy is not right in the head. I don’t want to be his nurse. That’s not the life I want.”

The pregnant sister said, “It’s not right that Mirjeta should be treated like this. Already, our father sent her to the United States to marry a man. He beat her and Mirjeta went back to Albania. Now, he makes her marry a man who is like a baby and has to be looked after all the time. And she must nurse the sick mother, too. She is like a slave to them both.”

Evon sighed. She stared at the photographs which cluttered the walls of the living room. Pictures of large family gatherings, children at parties, dancing, sunshine. “So, why did you marry this man, Mrs Bizi?”

"What do you mean?"

"Surely, you could tell that there was something wrong with him when you met him. So, why did you marry him?" She knew why. Mrs Bizi wanted permanent residency. Unfortunately, she'd found an autistic spouse with a terminally ill mother too much to handle. Yet, she'd only had to stick it out for two years to get PR. "So, are you still with your husband or have you separated?"

"Separated. He is writing to immigration to say he no longer will sponsor me. I can't go home. My father will beat me. This is the second time that he has arranged a marriage for me and I have had to leave. He'll kill me. I need protection."

Those words raised immediate alarm bells. It was obvious that Ms Bizi would not qualify as a refugee under the Convention but now that she had asked for Australia's protection, she had to be treated as an asylum seeker.

"Are you seeking protection from Australia?" Bell asked.

"Yes, I am afraid."

Evon rolled her eyes. It seemed that everyone applied for protection. They knew it took months to process the application. They knew that if the application were refused then they could take it to the Refugee Review Tribunal. And if the Refugee Review Tribunal affirmed the department's decision, then they could take it all the way through the court systems. Finally, they could appeal to the Minister to intervene. In the meantime, Mrs Bizi would find a new Australian husband, one without any annoying health deficits, and would apply for a new spouse visa. Case closed.

“You know,” Frederick said. “There may be an issue here with trafficking. This young lady was sent here against her will. And money appears to have changed hands. It does sound like the father sold her.”

Mrs Bizi sat forward. “Yes, he sell me. He sell me to the American man and now he sell me to this Australian boy.”

“Give the AFP a call, Frederick,” Bell said. “We’ll let them handle that aspect of it.” He turned back to Mrs Bizi. “We’re going to have to cancel your visa,” he said. “That’s because the situation that allowed the grant of the visa to you no longer exists. That is, you can’t hold a provisional spouse visa when you are no longer in a spousal relationship. Come into the office tomorrow and we’ll cancel your spouse visa and give you a new visa, a bridging visa. This will keep you lawful while you pursue protection. Okay?”

“Oh, yes. I’m very happy,” Mrs Bizi said. She reached out and placed a trembling hand on top of Bell’s hand. “You have helped me so much.”

“It was a pleasure, Mrs Bizi.” Bell opened his wallet. He drew a business card out and scribbled a mobile number on it. “If you have any problems, just call.”

Evon drove. This was because Bell had a large number of text messages to send.

“Great stuff, team,” Bell said. “That went very nicely. Isn’t it great when we all work together to achieve good outcomes?”

“Did you like my précis?” Willy asked.

"It was terrific. Very concise and to the point. And, Frederick, I liked your observation that this could be a trafficking case. Good work. We always have to be on the look out for things like that. We need to embrace the 'whole-of-government' approach." Bell looked at Evon. "What do you think?"

Evon thought for second. Bell had an expectant expression on his face. He was clearly willing her to say something positive, something "supportive". Willy also had a strange look on his face, like a puppy waiting for a pat on the head. "Um," Evon said. "Well done."

"Yes!" Bell said. "Very well done." He smiled at Evon and against her will, she found herself smiling back at him.

"And, Bell," Evon said. "I liked the subtle way you slipped her your business card."

"Actually, this isn't going to be my case," Bell said. "We can give this one to Willy. I feel he's ready to handle something like this. I gave Willy's card and contact details to Mrs Bizi, not mine. All right? And, Willy, if you need any help or support, just ask me. You're not on your own with this one."

They drove past Parliament House. The massive flag hung in the air, hovering like a magician's cloth. Voila! A rabbit! Canberra was like a dream object. It had been created out of nowhere. A created city based on a dream. It was as if a giant dreamer had awoken to find the city clasped in her fist, a small pointy city as symmetrical and as cold as a snowflake.

Evon stared out the car window at the water spout that erupted from Lake Burley Griffin, a massive fountain that was visible like a column of smoke for miles

around. For an instant, it threw a scattering of rainbows into the car. The coloured shards of light fluttered on her skin like tiny incorporeal butterflies.

“How’s the African detainee doing?” Bell asked Willy. “‘Rose’, the little dominatrix from the brothel?”

“She’s not my case anymore,” Willy said. “I gave her to Evon.”

Evon felt her skin prickle. She still hadn’t interviewed Rose. “I’m letting her stew,” she said. “It makes them easier to remove if they’ve been locked up for a while.”

Bell chewed his bottom lip. He had small gaps between all his front teeth. It made him look about twelve years old. “Make it your top priority,” he said. “We can’t leave people in detention any longer than necessary. It’s not fair on them.”

“Oh, fine.” A flock of hot air balloons suddenly surged over the top of the car and filled the sky in front of them. She heard the roaring of their burners and saw their fast shadows slide along the roadway. They reminded her of when she was little, just four, when her Dad had given her a big beach ball. It had been stripy and rainbow coloured, just like the air balloons overhead.

She had kept the box right in the corner, hidden under the deflated beach ball where no one would ever find it. She moved the beach ball aside, inhaling its warm plastic scent. The smell of the beach, the sand and the sea. Mum and Daddy had taken her to the beach once. It had been a long drive from Canberra. They’d been in the car for hours and Evon had vomited because she’d eaten too many lolly bananas. When they got to the beach, Evon wasn’t interested. She

didn't want to get out the car. She felt too sick. But, Daddy said if she got out then he'd give her a present. So, she did get out, and when she saw the sea and breathed in the air that sparkled with sunshine and salt, she'd felt a bit better.

Daddy had handed her the beach ball. It was still in its wrapping and it was completely flat and folded up into a rainbow rectangle. She'd taken it out of the packet and Daddy told her to grab the little clear tube that stuck out of it and to blow into it. He said to blow really hard. She'd put it to her mouth, inhaling the strange chemical scent of plastic. She blew but nothing happened.

Daddy laughed and took the ball. He'd put it to his mouth and with five big blows, the flat rectangle of plastic had become a big round beach ball. It was just like the big balloons that floated around Canberra but without a basket. She played with the ball all day and then they'd left. Evon went to sleep in the car on the way home. She woke up in her own bed, lying in the warm bright sunshine that filtered through her net curtains. She'd sat up and there at the end of the bed was a splash of colour. A flat, round, squashed rainbow. The ball was flat again. It stayed flat after that. Daddy said it must have got a hole in it, but Evon couldn't see one.

The flat ball made a perfect blanket for the box, hiding it from sight. The plastic curved around the box smoothly and intimately, and the smell of the sea lingered in its folds, reminding Evon of the bright white sand and the deep blue ocean. The ball was special and so was the box.

Evon clasped the box to her chest and wriggled out from under the bed. Sitting cross-legged on the floor, she unwrapped the box, slowly peeling the

plastic away from its sides. Finally, it sat on the floor. A shoe box covered in black crepe and sitting in the very centre of the brightly coloured circle. The outside of the box was decorated with stickers, scraps of tinsel and fragments of wrapping paper. Bright splashes of emerald, rose, sapphire and gold against the dark crepe. She'd written her name across the top of the box with a glitter glue pen. She ran her fingers along the raised letters: E ...V...O...N. Her name. Evon.

She lifted the lid off the box and set it aside. She took out two paperclips linked together which had been a silver necklace, a strawberry flavoured lolly which had been a fist-sized ruby, a crumpled tissue which had been a conch shell, and the exoskeleton of a cicada which had been a guitar.

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A tall man, very pale, with short light blonde hair sat on a big backpack outside the cafe in Gold Creek Village. He had two punnets of strawberries laid out on a tea towel on the ground. There was a small postcard sized sign stuck in the ground next to him. It read "For Sale". Evon saw him check his watch and then look up and down the road. Bell pulled up opposite him. "Evon, come with me. You two can stay in the car."

"My name's Daniel Bell. I'm an officer from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. May I ask your name, sir?"

"Mats Bruun, sir."

"And what visa do you hold, Mr Bruun?"

"A visitor visa." He bent over and straightened his little sign. "I'm very short of money so I am doing some work here. I am selling things. I also have another job. I am working for a man doing many things, like fixing cars and painting houses."

"Are you aware," Bell said. "That it is unlawful for you to work while on a visitor visa?"

"Yes, sir. I am aware. I am flaunting the law. I do not care."

Bell stared at him for a long moment then smiled and shook his head. "I think we should exercise our discretion here, Officer Carr. What do you think?"

"He's admitted to working." Evon frowned. "It's a blatant breach."

"A very blatant breach." Bell pointed at the suitcase. "What's in there, sir?"

"My clothes and my other things."

"Let me guess," Bell said. "You've run out of money. You can't afford a ticket home. Am I right?"

"Sir," Mr Bruun said, "I am breaking your laws. I should be sent straight home to Sweden. I am a disgrace to my country"

"Mr Bruun, I recognise your voice. You dobbed yourself in, didn't you?"

"Well, no. Not exactly." Mr Bruun's face flushed a bright red. "Well, sir, I –"

"Just report to immigration and request visa cancellation. Then we'll send you home as a destitute removal. Okay? Why don't you come in tomorrow at nine am?"

*

The office was quiet. As it was a Friday, not many people had turned up for work. They were taking flex days so they could have a long weekend. Evon sat down and started to update the records. The systems weren't working so she went for a walk down to the mail room. She stood at the reception counter and was ignored by two women in their fifties who were discussing menopause. "Excuse me," she said.

One of the women glanced at her but didn't stop discussing the risks and benefits of hormone replacement therapy.

Evon decided to carry on regardless. "I have a friend who is looking for work."

The women fell silent. One of the women, with short manly grey hair, wearing a smock-like top covered in roses, glared at Evon. "We only employ people with disabilities down here."

"He has Down syndrome and is eager to do something more challenging and interesting than selling the *Big Issue*."

The other woman waddled over to Evon. She shuffled through a pile of paper and gave Evon a form. "Get him to fill this out or fill it out for him. We employ lots of people with disabilities as APS 1s and 2s. It's good work for them. They learn a lot."

"Thanks." She went back to her desk and sat down. It was hard to decide whether or not she was doing Alex a favour or doing him harm.

Bell put a basket full of flowers and helium balloons on her desk.

"Thanks," Evon said. "I appreciate the recognition of my dedication and hard work." She pretended to wipe her eyes.

"Evon, I wouldn't be so presumptuous as to buy you flowers. You don't exactly seem like the flower type. But, if that's the sort of reward and recognition that you want, I'm sure something could be arranged."

Evon examined the flowers. They were an elaborate arrangement of deep purple tulips, sunflowers and red and orange gazanias. Very Bell. "So, why are you inflicting this creation of a colour-blind florist on me?"

"I'd like you to drop them off to Mr Tran on your way home. You go past the hospital on the way to Macgregor."

"Not a chance."

"Evon, you go right past. I live in the complete opposite direction. I can't drop them off at Calvary Hospital when I live in Tuggeranong. You can take it as flex."

"Why didn't you just have them delivered like a normal person?"

"It costs more and lacks the human touch."

"We're compliance officers, Bell, not human beings." She crossed her arms. "Anyway, it's unprofessional. Since when do we give gifts to clients?"

"It's a personal gesture from me as an individual. These flowers are from Daniel not Officer Bell."

"So, how come you're letting me take flex for the delivery time?"

“Look,” Bell said. “You saw what Mr Tran’s room is like. It’s completely bare of anything personal. Not a single ‘Get Well’ card. No flowers. Nothing. This will show him that someone does care.”

“Why flowers?” Evon asked. “What about a nice punnet of cherry tomatoes?”

“Flowers are beautiful. Everyone loves them.” Bell sighed. “I’d deliver them myself but my grandma’s expecting me around for dinner this evening. I’d just like Mr Tran to get the flowers as soon as possible.”

Evon tapped her fingernails on the desk. “Oh, fine! But, I think it’s a waste of money and a waste of my time.”

“Thanks, Evon. I owe you one.” Bell slapped her on the back and walked off.

“You most certainly do.” Evon pushed the flower basket behind her document holder.

Frederick leant over the partition. He was holding a cup of hot water with a piece of lemon floating in it. “I smell flowers,” he said. “Tulips and gazanias. Interesting combination. Who’s a lucky girl then?”

“Oh, go away.” Evon didn’t try to explain the situation to Frederick. It was hard to see what was worse: Frederick thinking she’d been given flowers by Bell, or Frederick thinking she was soft enough to act as Bell’s flower delivery girl.

*

Mr Tran was propped up in bed watching TV. Evon glanced at the screen: Inspector Rex.

"Are you a fan?" she asked. "Do you like Inspector Rex?"

Mr Tran blinked, "No." His smooth brown face held a kind of innocence but his eyes had a panicked look. He seemed thinner than she remembered, more delicate and vulnerable.

"Do you remember me? I'm Evon Carr. I came here before with some other officers from the Department of Immigration."

Mr Tran blinked, "Yes."

Evon shifted her weight from foot to foot and looked around the small room. It was just as Spartan as she remembered. "Do you remember Daniel Bell?"

He blinked, "Yes." Mr Tran was really very young. Only twenty-five and completely paralysed. Well, maybe he shouldn't have been taking drugs, but this was a harsh punishment for irresponsibility.

"Daniel asked me to give you these." She felt strange calling "Bell" by the name "Daniel". It seemed too intimate. "He sends you his best wishes." She put the flowers on the drawers beside his bed. They were outlandishly bright. Mr Tran stared at them and his eyes filled with tears. Lord, he was going to cry.

"Do you like them?" Evon asked.

Mr Tran blinked, "Yes," then "Yes," again.

"I'll tell Daniel." She bit her lip. "I'll let him know, okay?"

"Yes."

Evon looked back at the TV. Inspector Rex was chewing on a ham roll. As usual. "Do you want me to change channels for you?"

*

When she got home it was still light. She sat on the deck and watched her daughter walking on the garden bed retainer wall. Very wobbly. "Mum," Tess shouted. "Look at me!" She lost her balance and fell off. "Mummy!" She ran to Evon, crying, and Evon picked her up and put her on her lap.

"A great future ahead of her in the circus." Robert handed Evon a bottle of cider.

"Did that hurt, Tess?" Evon asked.

Tess nodded but she'd already stopped crying. "Yes. But, I'm okay now."

"Did you have a good day at kindy?"

"No. I got into a fight with Georgia. She doesn't believe me about my dreams. She said you can't dream things and make them real."

Evon met Robert's eyes. "It's probably best not to tell people you can do it. They never believe it."

Tess doubled over to look at a graze on her knee. "I told Georgia that if she wasn't nice I might have a dream about her."

Evon's mouth felt dry. She suddenly wondered what would happen if Tess dreamt about her then dismissed the thought as illogical and childish. She wished

Robert had never told Tess about Evon's dreams when she was a child. "You shouldn't threaten people, Tess."

"Not a threat," Tess said.

Evon and Robert laughed. Evon put her on her feet and dusted her off. "Go play, Tessie." The little girl ran off.

Robert shook his head. "She's precocious. Anyway, did you have a busy day?"

"Just the usual. An endless stream of false protection visa claimants, UNCs, duds et cetera. Oh, Willy got hit in the head with a tampon. That was pretty funny."

"Not for him," Robert said. "Was he upset?"

"Yes. He's pathetic."

"I don't blame him for being upset," Robert said.

"Whatever."

Tess was now collecting insects in her bug collector. Her light blonde hair floated on the breeze and caught the sun like a halo. It was a mystery to Evon how she had a blonde child when her own hair was so dark.

"She looks angelic, doesn't she?" Robert said.

"She does."

Robert put his hand on her knee. "Do you think we can talk now?"

"What about?"

“Your job, Evon, and what it’s doing to you?” His face was very close to hers. His eyes were a beautiful clear blue, like a summer sky. “You’re not happy.”

“I’m not sad, either.” She was neutral. Like the Pink Floyd song, she was “comfortably numb”.

“Have you given some thought to changing jobs, moving to a different area?”

“No. I haven’t.” She stood up. “I don’t want to change jobs.”

*

“Welcome to my new dungeon.” Rose was dressed very nicely for a detainee, in business attire, a skirt suit in charcoal grey, a white blouse, three strands of pearls and very red shiny lipstick. Detainees were allowed their own clothes. Her black hair, only a few shades darker than Evon’s own, was pulled back from her face into a chignon. A few curls had escaped and framed her face. Evon suddenly felt as if she were being interviewed rather than the other way around. “I like your outfit. What happened to the little leather number?” The woman really didn’t seem to belong in the starkly painted interview room with its peeling posters and cheap furniture.

The woman laughed. “Sometimes I wear black leather outfit, sometimes this. You’d be surprised how many men like to be subservient to a business woman. You’d think they’d get enough of it at the office.”

"You'd think so," Evon said, thinking of Steph.

The woman nodded. "A dominatrix does what she want to do and wears what she want to wear."

"Fair enough," Evon said. "Anyway, I want to ask you a few questions." She stared down at the scuffed lino. She could see what looked like the back end of a cockroach protruding from under the table leg. "What can you tell me about the man whom we detained the same night that we found you?"

"His name is Raven." The woman crossed her legs at the ankle. She wore panty hose the same delicate deep amber colour as her legs, and very high, yet demure, court shoes.

"What's his real name?" She slipped her right hand into the pocket of her trousers. The three beads were in there. She felt their cool shapes: the scarab, the bear and the turquoise bead.

"I don't know. Why haven't you sent him home, yet?"

"And where's his home?" Evon asked. The beads clinked like glass in her fingers.

"You don't know much, do you?"

"No, I don't." Questions tumbled out from her lips. "How long has Raven been here? What visa did he arrive on?" She felt like an idiot. Of course, the woman wouldn't reply, probably couldn't reply. How would she know any of this? "What's his date of birth?"

"How should I know?" the woman said.

Even though the answer was expected, Evon felt anger whip through her body. She hid it with a quick, cold smile. "Raven doesn't talk much, does he?"

The woman smiled. "Well, he's not the talkative type."

"I've noticed." She stared at the woman, hoping to scare her into speech.

The woman just smiled back at her.

Curiosity spurred Evon on. "Does he ever speak?"

"He speaks to people who need to listen and he listens to people who need to speak." The woman looked at a small gold watch. "You've been here for fifteen minutes. All you do is ask me questions about Raven. Don't you want to ask questions about me?"

Evon didn't want to leave. She drew out the three beads. "Raven gave me these. Why?"

The woman took them. "He gave you these? These are precious to him."

"What are they?"

"I don't know." Rose studied Evon intently, her pupils large and black against the brown of her irises. Evon felt like she was being examined by a scientist. "Why do you want to know so badly?"

"Well." Words tumbled out of her mouth before she could stop them. "I'm interested in dreams. When I was a child I used to think that I could dream things into reality. Silly really—"

The woman raised a perfectly arched eyebrow. "Could you?"

"I thought so. They would appear. I believed it." She rolled the beads in her palm. "I used to call them dream objects." She wished she could suck the words back out of the air, back down into her lungs, back into the synapses of her brain. But, the words hung there, like big pointy arrows, directed at her, with the word "idiot" written on them.

"The beads are pretty," Rose said.

Evon felt her face heat up and realised she was digging her nails hard into her palms. She felt strangely angry and also afraid. "You can keep them."

"They are yours." Rose handed them back to Evon.

"I don't want them." Evon took them anyway. "I hate dreaming."

"Yes, I think you do." Rose shrugged. "I guess they're missing me at the brothel. It's not easy to find a good dominatrix."

"Really, I find that hard to believe."

"It's not easy to find someone with right qualifications and temperament."

"What's in the selection criteria?"

The woman laughed. "You're very funny for a pube."

Evon raised her eyebrows at the infantile slang for "public servant". She knew a number of slang words for sex worker but wasn't going to be incited to use them. She didn't like to be manipulated. Her heart, though, was beating hard, setting a rhythm through her body that made her feel weak and helpless.

Rose sighed and shook her head slowly. "Do you know what I do?"

It was hard to concentrate on the woman. The beads clinked in her hand. She only wanted to talk about the dreams. But, it was better to put that aside, to store it for another time, when she could concentrate. "No. What do you do?"

"I don't just teach obedience." She leant forward over the desk. "I watch people carefully. I watch their faces and I treasure what I see. Joy. Pain. Anger. Betrayal. Love. Lust. I see all emotions, pure and simple, written on their faces. Emotions that I have painted on their lips and eyes and in the lines of their faces."

"I don't know why you would care."

"Because I care about people. It's my job."

Chapter twelve

The bus was strangely empty today but Alex was in his usual place. He was wearing a suit and tie. In one hand he was carrying a brief case that closely resembled Evon's. In the other hand, he held a yellow yo yo.

"Hi, Mum."

"Hi, son."

"So, you got the job?"

"Yes. No more *Big Issue*."

"Great." They got off the bus at the same stop and walked to work together. She watched him walk down stairs to the mail room. She hoped he'd like it there.

"Evon, the police picked up an English guy last night in Tuggeranong. They think he's unlawful. We need to collect him from the lock-up and have a talk to him. Ready?" Bell picked up his briefcase. "Frederick, you can come along, too."

"Great!" Frederick picked up his white cane and stuck his mobile in his pocket.

Evon sighed. She wished she could just have a few hours stuck in the office so she could get on top of all her paperwork and get some time to update the systems. It seemed whenever she did have some spare time, the computers were on 'go slow' or had crashed. They'd spent eight million to update the systems but nothing worked.

"Cheer up!" Bell said. "This shouldn't take too long." He was wearing a mustard yellow suit with an orange shirt and a black tie with sunflowers on it. His cufflinks were enamel cherries. Evon didn't know how he managed to pull it off but he did.

"Hey," Bell said. "Did I see you strolling along the road with a young man earlier today?"

"No."

"A clandestine assignation with a young gentleman wearing a snazzy suit and playing with a yellow yo yo?"

"What of it?" Evon waited while the computer slowly uploaded a message designed to remind immigration officers that the department was fair, reasonable, open and accountable. The message was illustrated with the usual marketing clichés. A black woman in a pinstripe skirt standing next to a white man with glasses and a grey haired man in a suit. A young Asian woman gesturing towards a graph with a pen. A woman wearing a hijab. Two business people, a man and a woman, pointing at a computer screen and looking concerned.

Frederick smiled. "It's good that you have a friend."

"I don't have any friends. Thank goodness." Friends were too much trouble.

"What about us?" Bell asked. "Aren't we your friends?"

"You're my colleagues."

Frederick frowned. "What about when you were little? Did you have friends then? Maybe a best friend?"

"No." Evon remembered Suzie. That hadn't turned out well.

Suzie was Evon's best friend and today she was turning eight. Evon was invited to her party and Mum and Dad had said that she could go because Suzie lived at the end of the street and it would be no trouble for Evon to walk there herself.

Evon was much older than Suzie because she was already eight. Her birthday had been four weeks ago but she hadn't had a birthday party. Mum and Dad had been too busy this year. Evon didn't mind. Birthday parties were scary with all the kids running around and all the attention. Evon didn't like it when she had to blow out the candles and everyone looked at her. She didn't like it when she had to open all the presents and look happy when she saw what she'd got. Even when she loved her presents, her mouth wouldn't smile properly and everyone thought she was being sulky and ungrateful.

Evon put on her best Pumpkin Patch skirt and top and went into the kitchen. Dad was sitting at the table doing a crossword. Evon remembered when she was little. She had just learnt to write the letters of the alphabet. She had tried to help Dad do his crossword by filling in all the little boxes with letters. Now, she knew you

had to put words in the boxes, not just letters. She'd been quite silly when she was a baby.

Dad looked up. "Good morning, Evon." He was drinking a cup of coffee and the steam was spinning in the light from the window. "Did you sleep well? Have any interesting dreams?"

"No." She dreamt about an oyster. She'd opened it up and inside, lying in soft folds of pale grey flesh, there had been a big round pearl, glowing and sparkling with rainbow colours. When she'd woken up, the pearl had been in her hand, still a bit sticky from being in the oyster shell, but beautiful. She didn't want to tell Dad about it because he might not take it seriously.

"Hey," Dad said. "I just read a joke in the paper." He laughed. "Last night, I dreamt I was eating a three kilogram marshmallow. When I woke up, I'd eaten my pillow." He laughed again. "Pretty funny, eh?"

Evon didn't laugh. It wasn't funny. Dad's laughing made her feel angry. "That could really happen."

"Sure!" Dad was smiling. "It could."

Evon could tell he didn't really think it could happen. Suddenly, the words came out of her. "I dream like that. I can remember when I was three. I dreamt I was swimming in Lake Burley Griffin and when I woke up the bed was wet. Mum said that I'd done a wee in the bed but that wasn't true. The water was from the lake."

Dad laughed again. "That's very clever."

“Once I dreamt an aeroplane crashed into the ground. When I woke up there was a dead fly on my bedside table.” She just wished she could dream things that she wanted. She really wished she could have a kitten, but she couldn’t dream one no matter how hard she tried.

“That’s funny, too. You’re a clever girl, Evon.”

Evon felt a mixture of angry and happy. It was good that Dad thought she was clever but it was bad that he didn’t believe her. She shouldn’t have told him anything.

Dad glanced at her. “You look nice. Is that your Pumpkin Patch skirt? Hope you’re not wearing it to play outside.”

“It’s because of Suzie’s party,” Evon said. “I want to look nice. She’s turning eight. Like me.” She wished she could make him believe her but she knew it was better not to try.

“Great. Are you leaving now?”

“Yes. Her party’s at ten o’clock.”

“Oh, you’ll have to hurry then. You’ve only got five minutes. Have you got everything?” Dad turned his attention back to the crossword. Evon could see the small spiky hairs on the back of his neck. Some of them were grey but most of them were black. His words felt like a whirlpool that was sucking her right in to the middle and down the drain pipe. She didn’t have everything!

“No. I forgot.” Evon felt her skin heat up and prickle all over. Suzie would be so angry that she would stop being her friend. All the other kids would be angry too.

"Forgot what?"

Evon could see Suzie sitting at a big table covered in presents. One by one, she would open them. Each present would make her smile. Suzie wouldn't find it hard to look happy when she opened presents. Even if she got a bad present, she would still look happy. Then all the presents would be opened. Suzie's Mum would start to pick up all the wrapping paper and stuff it into a big green garbage bag. Suzie's Mum didn't like mess and dirt.

Suzie would frown and look around. "Where's the present from Evon?"

Evon could hardly make her mouth move. "I don't have a present for Suzie."

Dad looked up and frowned. "Did you ask Mum to get you one?"

"Yes, but she must have forgot. I forgot, too. I should have reminded her. She's busy."

"Well," Dad said. "Just tell Suzie that you'll give her a present on Tuesday. I'll buy one for her at lunchtime tomorrow and you can wrap it when I get home."

"I have to give it to her at the party," Evon said. "I have to."

"I'm sure she won't mind. It will be an extra present to look forward to."

"She will mind." Evon could imagine Suzie's round black eyes staring at her. She could imagine all the other children staring at her.

Dad beckoned her over and put an arm around her. Evon buried her face in his shoulder. She tried hard not to cry but tears were coming out her eyes. "Evon, I could ring her and say that you're not well."

Evon shook her head. That would be even worse. Suzie would be even

angrier. Evon was her best friend. She had to go to the party. And she had to give her a present.

“Maybe you’ve got something you can give her,” Dad said. “A toy that you haven’t used and that Suzie hasn’t seen. Your birthday wasn’t long ago. Maybe you can give her one of your presents.”

Evon didn’t feel like crying any more. Dad was so smart. He could fix anything. “Yes, I do have something!” She pulled away from Dad and ran out the kitchen. “I do.”

It was just like Evon imagined. Suzie sat at a big table, covered in a bright plastic table cloth with pink hearts on it. She had a big pile of presents in front of her. All the children were crowded around the table. Suzie’s Mum stood behind Suzie, holding a big green garbage bag, ready to clean up the wrapping paper.

Evon could see the present that she had chosen for Suzie. It was small but it was beautiful. She had put the present in a matchbox. She had wrapped it in a piece of gold coloured paper that she had kept from her own birthday and she had tied a little blue ribbon around it. Evon knew that Suzie would love it. “Open mine first!” Evon said.

Suzie smiled and picked up the little present. “It’s small,” she said.

“Good things come in small packages,” Suzie’s Mum said.

Suzie undid the blue ribbon and carefully set it aside. She unpeeled the sticky tape and unwrapped the paper. The matchbox sat in the centre of the gold square of wrapping paper. “Oh, a matchbox.”

"Open it!" Evon had filled the box with a soft layer of cotton wool. She'd made a little hollow in the cotton wool for the present and covered it with a tiny piece of tissue paper. She didn't want it to get damaged.

Suzie slowly slid the box open. She lifted off the piece of tissue paper. "Ew! What is it?" She picked up the pearl. Little pieces of cotton wool had stuck to it. "Oh, yuck! It's a Koolmint!"

The other children were laughing. Suzie's Mum was frowning. "Put it down, Suzie. It's dirty."

"Ew! It's all wet! It's been sucked!" Suzie's eyes met Evon's. "How could you do this to me! I hate you! I hate you!"

"Yep, friends were great!" Evon's phone rang and she picked it up. "Yes. Evon. Immigration."

"It's me."

"Who?" There was five seconds of heavy breathing. Bell stared at her intently, frowning slightly. Frederick wasn't staring at her but he was facing her direction.

"Me."

"I see." Evon drew a cube on her pad of post-it notes. "So, what can I do for you?" She drew a tiny daisy in the middle of the cube and coloured it in black.

"I don't know anyone. I'm scared to eat lunch."

It was Alex. "Okay, I'll pick you up at 12 noon outside the mail room. Okay?"

“Okay.” He hung up.

“Who was that?” Bell asked. “A boyfriend?”

“You bet.”

The English guy, Gavin Robinns, was a real loudmouth. He sat in the back of the car with Frederick and didn’t stop talking for a second. “I don’t get it? I was just having a walk around the car lot trying to decide what car to buy. The fucking police just come up to me and start abusing me. I thought Australia was a free country? You could’ve fooled me.”

Evon snorted. “Funny time to look at cars. Two in the morning.”

“I’d been working a shift. It’s the only time I get to look around. I can’t believe this is happening to me. I just want to buy a car. Something with grunt.”

“You’ve got no right to work in Australia. Where were you working?”

“This country has a shortage of workers and you’re telling me I shouldn’t work. That’s just fucked!”

“Why did you need a crowbar?” Evon said.

“I got locked out of my apartment. I was going to jemmy the door open. Fucking hell!”

The police hadn’t bothered with charging Mr Robbins. It was easier and less resource intensive just to let immigration deal with people like this. Immigration

would lock him up, organise his travel and send him home. "So, how come you were wearing the balaclava?"

"Evon, how about you finish up the paperwork?" Bell waved out the window at another driver, presumably a friend of his.

"It was fucking cold. That's fucking why!" Robbins said. "Why else would I wear a balaclava?"

"So, you were in a car lot, at two in the morning, holding a crow bar and wearing a balaclava, and you're surprised that the police picked you up. How amusing!" Evon said. "You must have been astonished."

"You are a fucking bitch," Mr Robbins said. "It's people like you who are dragging this country down. All I ask is for human understanding. I have a perfectly good explanation for what I was doing."

"You must think we're complete idiots—"

"Enough, Evon. Please be quiet," Bell said. "This isn't helping any."

"Fine!"

Bell stuck a CD in the player. Oh, lord, he was listening to Abba.

"I'll just drop you both off at the detention centre," Bell said. "I've got a pile of work to do back at the office. Frederick, you can do the interview and the VIN. Evon, you can take the notes. All right?"

"Yes!" Frederick sounded pleased with himself.

Mr Robbins didn't seem too happy with the detention centre. "It's got fucking razor wire!" he said. "I can't believe it. You can't lock me up in here."

Evon led him into the interview room. "Why not?"

"You just can't." Mr Robbins said. "It's just not acceptable. Civilised countries don't treat people like this. You've got no right."

"If you don't like it here, just tell us where your passport is and we'll send you home."

She took a document out of his file. Mr Robbins was a slightly interesting case. He had a brother and a mother who were both Australian citizens. Apparently, his family had moved to Australia ten years ago when Mr Robbins was nine years old. There must have been a family breakdown and Mr Robbins had returned to the United Kingdom with his father two years later. He'd since lost his right to reside in Australia. The strange thing was that there was no record of Mr Robbins re-entering Australia at any point. Yet, here he was sitting in front of her. Had he entered on a false passport? Could he have been a stowaway, perhaps?

"What visa did you enter Australia on?" Evon asked.

Frederick cleared his throat. "I believe I am conducting this interview, Officer Carr." He leant forward. "Answer the question, please, Mr Robbins."

"No visa. I swam here." He grinned hugely, displaying perfect teeth. "Took me some time, I can tell you."

"Did you come on a boat?" Evon felt a surge of anger with herself. She'd asked a question that could put ideas into his head.

"You got it! This one's a rocket scientist. Ker ching! You've won a prize."

"What's the name of the boat?" Frederick asked.

"Nah, can't tell you that! Don't want to get any of me mates into trouble." He shook his head. "Sorry, dude."

"So, when did you arrive?"

"I'm not saying nothing, mate." He leant back in his chair and put his arms behind his head. He appeared to be enjoying himself. "I'm keeping stumm."

"Tell me about your brother, then," Frederick said. "How come he's an Aussie?"

"Me brother's a genius. Absolute genius. I got nothing but respect for Brendon. Tell you what, you wouldn't find him wandering about a car lot at night with a crow bar. He's a rich man. A rich man. And an athlete. Won the karate world championships last year. Honestly, if he finds out how you've been treating me, he'll be all over it. He's got a law degree, you see."

Evon scribbled this stream of shite into her notebook. Why was Frederick letting him go on and on about his brother?

"Tell me how he became a citizen, then. How come you didn't?"

Evon zoned out. At this rate, they'd be here interviewing Mr Robbins for hours. Frederick needed to focus.

"Evon," Frederick said. "We need to talk. Let's step outside for a moment." They stood in the hall.

“All right,” Frederick said. “I no longer hold a reasonable suspicion that Mr Robbins is an unlawful non-citizen. We have to let him go.”

“What the hell?” Evon stood up. “He’s admitted to it!”

“He is obviously not Gavin Robbins,” Frederick said. “He is, in fact, pretending to be his English brother, Brendan Robbins.”

“What?” Evon frowned.

“He gave his brother’s details to the police instead of his own. Probably, the police are looking for Gavin Robbins. They’re not looking for Brendan. We have to release him.”

“But, how did you know?”

“It’s obvious,” Frederick said. “The way he was talking up his ‘brother’. His use of the Australian vernacular. His general demeanor. He was too confident. He wasn’t behaving like a man who had no right to be in the country. He’s playing us, Evon.”

Evon thought about it. “Okay, you’re right. Get the police on the phone.”

Frederick made the call on his mobile. “They’ve got Brendan’s prints on file. There’s a warrant out for his arrest. They’re coming down to check him out.”

*

"Hi, Mum." Alex's yo yo was a blur of yellow. Evon couldn't stop herself from watching it hurtle up and down, up and down. "Your yo yo is hurting my eyes," she said.

"I'm sorry, Evon," Alex said. "I'm just scared." He stuffed the toy in his pocket.

Evon sighed. The line at the café was huge. The "Yellow Cake" was the café of choice for immigration this year and it was stuffed with public servants. Not one of them passed the dress code. As it was a cold day, most of them were failing on "fluffy jacket" grounds. Evon wished she could issue them with breach notices.

"Big issue!" Alex said quietly.

Evon stared at him closely. He looked unhappy. "What's wrong?"

"I don't belong here."

"Of course, you don't. Consider it a good thing." It was Evon's turn to order. "A lemon meringue pie and a long black." She looked at Alex. "What would you like? I'll pay."

"A chicken schnitty on a white roll and a bottle of coke." Alex sniffed. His eyes were glossy and it occurred to Evon he was about to cry. Evon hoped not.

They took a seat outside. An icy wind blew off the mountains and Evon pulled her coat tightly around her. Alex seemed unaffected by the cold. He sat silently and took massive bites out of his chicken schnitzel roll.

“Why did you say you don’t belong?” Evon asked. “Aren’t the people in the mail room making you feel welcome? I’ll go and sort them out if they’re being mean to you.”

“They’re not mean.”

“So, what’s the problem?”

“Did you know I have Down Syndrome?” Alex said. He’d finished his schnitty and was licking his fingers noisily. “Did you notice?”

“Yes, of course.” Evon spooned the meringue off the top of her pie. It was delicious. Crusty on the surface and soft underneath. “What about it?”

“Everyone in the mail room has Down syndrome or they can’t talk properly or they don’t think so good. How come we’re all separated from everyone else? I thought I’d be with you. I thought we’d do the same work in the same place.”

Ah, the public service’s famous devotion to tokenistic diversity. The department was happy to hire people with disabilities but then locked them up in the mail room where they would remain unseen, hidden away, trotted out for promotional photography and referred to in the annual diversity report. “What work did you want to do?”

“I wanted to help the Africa people. The thin black people. I wanted to give them some food and show them the nice things in Canberra. Like the Telstra tower and the big fountain. All I do is put files in big yellow envelopes.”

Basically, he wanted to work in the fluffy bunny division: settlement. “I don’t know if I can help.”

"I'm still hungry." Alex was looking at her pie.

Evon pushed it over to him. "You'll get fat.

Alex laughed. "I am fat." He took a spoon of lemon curd. "Spelled P H A T".

"Okay, you're phat." Cars drove by, their exhaust leaving white trails in the still air. "Maybe you could work with me." It was hard to imagine Alex in compliance. He seemed too kind, but it had to be better than the mail room.

"Okay," Alex said. "Do I get a badge?"

"Sure."

*

"So," Steph said. "You detained another Australian citizen. This is getting to be a habit in your team. You've detained more Aussies than UNCs this month. Shame we don't have a target for stuffing up!"

"He claimed to be unlawful," Bell said. "And we held a reasonable suspicion."

Steph leant forward over her desk. Evon could see a tattoo of a small red strawberry on her right breast. She would have expected something more Gothic, perhaps a spider or a bat. Steph said: "He had no entry on record. Surely it was obvious he couldn't have been from the United Kingdom."

“The systems are useless,” Evon said. “Anyone with any experience in compliance knows that. You can’t rely on ICSE or movement records to determine someone’s status. And the new system is completely rooted.”

“National Office is not going to be pleased. If the media finds out, we’re in trouble again. Why can’t you people just do your jobs properly?” She slammed the palm of her hand onto the desk. “Now just get out there and do some work. Go and locate some real unlawfully for once!”

Bell and Willy walked out but Evon stopped in front of the doorway. She shut the door. “Can I talk to you for a minute, Steph?”

“Didn’t I just tell you to get out of here?” Steph leant back in her chair and steepled her fingers together. Just the sight of her made Evon want to smack her in the head. Steph had no idea. She’d never gone on a job. She never left the office. She’d never tried to wade through the broken immigration computer systems to determine someone’s status. She’d never listened to the lies and subterfuges of people desperate to remain in Australia. She was a National Office lackey. If you put her in the field, face-to-face with actual clients, she would shit herself.

“So, what do you want?”

“I have a friend who’s interested in working in compliance.”

Steph yawned. “Don’t we all?”

“This guy is different.”

“Is he your boyfriend?” Steph’s gaze shifted to her computer monitor. She appeared to be reading email.

"I don't have a boyfriend. I have a husband and a six year old daughter."

This conversation wasn't going the way that Evon intended. She had no idea how to communicate with this woman.

"Too bad." Steph smiled, clearly at something she'd read on her monitor.

"So, tell me about this person."

"Well, he works for the department. In the mail room. He's an APS 1."

"You expect me to act him up three levels to be a compliance officer? I don't think so."

"Maybe, he could be a note taker, or... something."

"What's his disability?" Steph scrolled her mouse viciously. It seemed to be growling in protest at her rough treatment. She gave it a clunk on the desk to subdue it.

"Down syndrome." Evon tried to think of an argument that would convince Steph. "We're supposed to embrace diversity. It would look good for you when you go for promotion." Too blunt, Evon realised. Too crass. Too obvious.

"I do embrace diversity," Steph said. "I have a woman on the compliance team and I have a blind man. I don't need any more dead weight." She laughed loudly, presumably to indicate that she was making a cutting edge ironic joke rather than being politically incorrect. "Now, get out."

Bell was waiting outside the door. "What were you doing?"

"I was being an idiot," Evon said. "A complete moron."

"Don't be so hard on yourself."

“I’m just—” Evon felt her voice shake and her eyes watered. Why had she bothered?

Bell punched her lightly on the arm. “Time for a team meeting,” he said. “At the Palace.”

*

“Look,” Bell said. “Let’s not let Steph get us down. Just because we’re not meeting arbitrary National Office targets, doesn’t mean that we’re not doing well.”

“She puts the pressure on,” Frederick said. “You’d think she’d be pleased that we worked out Mr Robbins was an impostor. Instead, she’s just acting like she’s disappointed that he’s not an UNC.”

Evon took a gulp of cider. Every year National Office raised the targets. Last year, they’d actually doubled them. The problem was that funding was linked to the number of locations made. So, management was always pushing for more people to be found and stuck in the detention centre. “You did well, Frederick,” she said. “You worked that one out brilliantly. I’d have stuck him in the centre until he rotted.”

Willy whistled. “Yep, it was brilliant.”

“It was.” Evon felt exhausted.

“Thank you for the compliment,” Frederick said. “I appreciate it.”

“You’re welcome,” Evon said.

They sat for a few minutes in silence. Even Bell’s mobile remained quiet.

"So, Evon," Bell said. "Why did you stay back to talk to Steph? What happened in there?"

"I asked her to give a job to a friend of mine. She laughed at me. She's a bitch. It's no big deal."

"Who's the friend?" Bell asked.

"Alex. He works in the mail room."

"Is he the gentleman with the yo yo?" Bell asked.

"Yes."

"Maybe, I can help," Bell said. "Give me the details and I'll talk Steph around."

Evon nodded slowly. Bell probably could persuade Steph. He could persuade anyone. "All right."

Willy was still smiling and shaking his head. "I just can't believe you have a friend, Evon. Well done. You're becoming more human by the day."

"He's not my friend," Evon said.

"Just change the subject, Willy," Bell said. "Just move on."

"Okay," Willy said. "Frederick. Tell us about your sister. Is she single?"

"She's married with two kids," Frederick said. "So, don't get your hopes up."

"Just wondering."

"What're the kids like?" Bell asked. "Cute?"

“I don’t know,” Frederick said. “I’ve never seen them. My sister and I had a falling out a few years ago. Probably ten years ago. “

“What about?” Willy asked. “Must have been serious.”

“No, not really.” Frederick sipped his drink, orange juice. “We had problems after I went blind. She felt it was her fault. Guilt drives a wedge between people.”

“Were you angry with her?” Evon asked. She noticed Bell was still wearing the dream catcher. She was tempted to ask him if it was working.

Frederick sighed. “No, not angry. Just sad.”

Chapter thirteen

Steph sat on Evon's desk, tipping it slightly. "So, what's all this about a paralysed person from Vietnam?"

Bell spun around on his chair. "Steph, you got my email."

Evon knew Bell had to email Steph as she had a very strict closed door policy. You didn't get to see Steph without arranging it in advance.

"He's in Calvary Hospital," Evon said. "He's got no funds to go home and he's unlawful."

"I've spoken to his sister," Bell said. "She can't pay for his removal but she's said she's willing to look after him in Vietnam. She said, she has no money. She has four children and is very poor."

"So, is he fit to travel?" Steph asked.

"The doctor says so," Bell said. "But, I have my doubts. He's on full life support. Apparently, he nearly died last week when his tracheotomy tube blocked."

"Could be messy if he died on the plane," Steph said. "We'd get the blame. The Minister would be embarrassed. The government would be embarrassed. Not a good look."

"He'll almost certainly die when he gets to Vietnam," Bell said. "His sister can't afford hospital care for him."

"Well, as long as he doesn't die while we're responsible for him," Steph said. "The Australian public doesn't care what happens to foreign citizens in their own countries. Why should we?"

"How about we just put him on a bridging visa?" Bell said. "He doesn't want to go home."

"It doesn't matter what he wants," Steph said. "He has no right to be here. Why should the Australian public pay for his expensive medical bills? His own country is responsible for him." She smoothed her painted on eyebrow with her index finger. "Have you contacted the Vietnamese embassy? They should take responsibility for him."

"Yes," Bell said. "They can contribute \$3000 to his removal. They say they're not funded for situations like this."

Willy was ignoring the conversation. He stared at his computer screen with a fixed expression on his face. Frederick was listening attentively but didn't look as if he were going to contribute. Evon wanted to say she agreed with Steph but didn't want to look like a suck-up. Also, the fact that Steph was supporting this idea, made her think it was dodgy.

"And what's the total cost of the removal?" Steph asked.

“About \$50 000,” Bell said.

“Bloody hell.” Steph stood up. “Well, get removals on to it. Let’s see if we can get him out of here by the end of the week.”

“But,” Bell said. “We’re sending him home to die.”

“Look at it this way,” Steph said. “His family want him home. His consulate wants him home. He doesn’t have a visa to be here. It’s black and white. He’s going back to Vietnam. The sooner the better.”

“We’re killing him.”

“No, we’re not. It’s not our fault his country has inadequate medical facilities. If he’d been working in a tomato field in Vietnam and this had happened, he’d already be dead. Now, get working on it. I don’t want us to spend too much time on this one. This is no longer a compliance issue. It’s now a case for removals. End of story.” She stood up and went back to her office.

“Thank you very much for the support!” Bell said.

Evon said, “I’m sorry, Bell. I don’t know what to think about it. “

Frederick shook his head. “I don’t know either. His family want him back. Maybe he’s better off surrounded by family and people who care about him than in a foreign country.”

“And you, Willy?”

“I was too scared to disagree with her,” Willy said. “She terrifies me.”

Bell stood up abruptly. “I need a break from this.” He walked out.

Willy shook his head. "I wish I'd said something. We're talking about someone's life here. But, anyway, I've got to leave early today. Got a date." He turned off his computer. "A hot date."

"Who?" Evon asked.

"That Albanian chick, Mirjeta. The one married to the autistic dude."

"You can't date a client," Evon said. "Conflict of interest."

"Oh, chill." Willy ran a comb through his hair. "Everyone does it."

"Apart from the fact that she's a client, she's married," Evon said. "What're you thinking?"

"I'm thinking, she's hot and I'm single. That's all, folks!" He grinned, waved and left.

*

Evon sat with Robert and watched the final episode of *Blake's Seven*, *Gauda Prime*. This episode was known for its surprising finale where the entire cast was shot in a massacre. It was Evon's favourite episode.

Robert sipped a cup of coffee. "It was busy at work today. I had to collate a whole lot of statistics on tariffs by close of business. And I had a meeting and a teleconference to go to. It's good to get home and relax."

“Sure is.” Evon closed her eyes. She’d got home on time for once, around six o’clock. Robert had already fed Tess and she was playing on her Nintendo in her bedroom.

“Tess got into trouble today at kindy,” Robert said. “She told a kid from Africa that her Mum was going to cancel his visa and stick him in detention because he was a dud.”

Evon opened her eyes. “No way!”

“Really. I had to explain to the teacher that she’s just influenced by your job.”

“I’ll have to talk to her.”

“It’s okay. I already explained.” The entire cast of *Blake’s Seven* except for Avon now lay bleeding on the ground. Avon grinned at the camera and the episode closed with the sounds of space guns. Presumably, that was the end of Avon. Robert turned the TV off. “Best episode ever.”

“Yep. A classic.”

“Tess’s teacher is from Sri Lanka. She wanted to know if you could check on the progress of her Mum’s aged parent visa. Apparently, she’s worried because her Mum has Alzheimer’s and can’t look after herself.”

“You told her ‘no’, I assume.” It would have been depressing to tell her the truth that the current processing time for aged parent visas was ten years. It would have been even more depressing to tell her that aged parent visas were not granted to people who couldn’t meet the medical requirements.

"I said you wouldn't know because you don't work in that area of the department."

"Good answer."

*

The detention centre was quiet. The department had managed to send a large number of detainees back home over the weekend. Evon entered the interview room to find Rose sitting in an orange plastic chair, dressed in a leather outfit. A leather bodice, elbow-length gloves, leather trousers, a black velvet choker and scarlet lipstick. Her presence seemed to transform the interview room into a torture chamber. Evon could imagine a rack, shackles and pointy iron instruments.

"Welcome back." The woman laughed. "You seem to like it here."

"Well, I spend enough time here. Do you like it?" Evon was finding it hard to adjust to the incongruity of Rose's outfit.

Rose clearly had a sense of humour. "I've worked in nicer places. Up until last year I worked in a house with four storeys and an indoor swimming pool. The first storey was where the men picked what women they wanted. The other floors had the fantasy rooms."

"I see. What are fantasy rooms?"

"Well, there was one like an old-fashioned school room. There were blackboards on easels, desks with shelves underneath, slates with slate pencils

attached, and ink bottles with pens sticking out of them. It was for men who liked school girls or school teachers.”

“Yes, I get it.”

“In another room, we had stocks and a raised platform with a guillotine. There was red paint splashed around. It was for men who like to have a bit of a fantasy about ravishing doomed French queens. They get to put her in the stocks, throw fruit at her, march her up the guillotine and have their way with her while she waits for the blade to fall. What else did we have? The dungeon, obviously, my specialty. We had the witch hunt, the opera house stage, Queen Elizabeth throne room—”

Despite herself, Evon asked, “What’s that?”

“That room was set up like the throne room, and we have a girl who looks like the Queen summon the man in and ask him to satisfy her in various ways in front of her courtiers. Very popular.” The woman smiled. She seemed to be enjoying the memories. “What else? Roman baths, the convent, the witches’ coven, the nunnery, Stonehenge in *papier mâché*, the kennel, South Seas island, nursery. Fluffy soft toy room.”

Evon almost asked about that but managed to control herself. “Well, that’s all very interesting, but we need to talk about sending you home. I’m going to hand your case over to the removals team so they can make your travel arrangements.”

“You don’t know where to send me.”

“I’ll find out soon enough.”

“So,” Rose said, “Do you have a man?”

"It's none of your business." She thought of Robert playing Mariokart on the Xbox with Tess. He always let her win. "I have a husband and a child."

"So, why aren't you at home with them, instead of chasing poor people with no visas."

"It's my job," Evon said. "We all have to earn our money somehow."

"Some ways are better than others," Rose said.

Evon snorted. "You can talk!"

Rose pulled a face and then smiled broadly. "Why are you so interested in dreams?"

"Why do you think I am? I'm not really." Evon frowned. "Why do you ask so many questions? You never stop talking."

"I like to talk. And, yes, you are interested in dreams. You know, every culture understands dreams are special. Have you ever talked to an Aboriginal? They understand that dreaming is an act of creation."

"They don't literally believe it."

"How would you know?" Rose smiled. "Seriously, I think you don't know a single Aboriginal person. Do you?"

"No. Not one. But then, I'm not very sociable. I don't know anyone outside of work."

"That's got nothing to do with it. Your middle classes don't mix with blacks. You got apartheid here. You just won't admit to it. You keep it invisible."

“Maybe you’re right.” Evon watched Rose. She looked so formidable. “If you don’t like it here why don’t you go back to Africa?”

“I don’t want to go back.”

Evon shook her head slowly. Rose would go home whether she liked it or not. She would go home and so would Raven.

Rose grinned at Evon. “Hey, lighten up. You ever smile?”

“Only sardonically.”

Rose laughed. “You have a sense of humour. You’re strange but interesting.” Rose held out her hand. “You’re always welcome to spend time with me, Evon Carr. And so is your friend. He came to visit me a few times at the brothel.”

“Who?”

“The young man, Danny. He’s a good customer. He’s not like you. He knows a lot about love.”

She couldn’t resist asking. “Did he visit you often?”

“Oh, yes. I comb his hair. It’s very long and thick. I comb it and he falls asleep in my arms. He forgets everything, even you.” She grinned broadly. “Do you believe me?”

“Not for a moment.” Evon took a deep breath. “What’s Raven to you?”

Rose was silent for a moment. It was a long moment. Evon knew instantly that she had Rose. “Is he your lover? Your husband?” She watched Rose’s face closely. “Your brother?”

"He's nothing to me." Rose's voice was hard. Her face was smooth and expressionless. Too expressionless.

"I tell you what," Evon said. "How about we negotiate? You tell me who you are, and I'll find a reason to let Raven go. I'll grant him a bridging visa." Not in a million years.

Rose's voice was very quiet. Evon had to lean close to hear her speak. She was so close, she could smell Rose's sweet woody perfume.

"I don't trust you," Rose said.

"Just tell me your name and date of birth," Evon said. "That's all."

Rose pressed the heels of her hands hard against her eyes. "You'll let him go?"

"Yes."

Chapter fourteen

“Okay,” Steph said. “I have two very exciting things to tell you.” She smiled broadly, displaying big white teeth. One of them, the right canine, had a tiny black Swarovski crystal embedded in it. It looked like a poppy seed.

“Firstly, you’re going to have a new team member. His name is Alex and he’s going to bring some very special skills to the team. He’s going to contribute a whole fresh perspective on our work. He’s very happy to be joining you.”

Evon looked at Bell. He smiled at her. How had he persuaded Steph that this was a good idea? Dealing with Steph was like dealing with the devil. There was always a price to pay. Evon hoped that Bell would be paying it and not her.

“Secondly,” Steph said. “And this is even more exciting! I’m pleased to tell you that Nat Comms has decided to star your team in the latest in-house video edition of *Immigration People*. You’re going to be movie stars.”

“Why us?” Frederick asked.

That was the price, Evon realised. Public humiliation. She remembered the days when the National Communications Branch hadn’t existed. It had been

created following a major immigration scandal to act as a propaganda machine for the department. The whole north side of the fifth floor at national office had been converted into a series of state-of-the art recording and filming studios. It was rumoured that the outfitting had cost 50 million dollars. Nat Comms produced an endless stream of lame video productions featuring departmental "talent" acting out the roles of migration agents, boat people, happy Muslim humanitarian entrants and so on. Lately, Nat Comms had been branching out and putting some of these awful productions on YouTube and Facebook.

"Well, I don't know if you've read the latest edition of *The State of the Public Service* —" She paused as everyone shook their heads. "Of course, you haven't. Anyway, apparently, the department is not quite meeting its targets for embracing diversity. This is just a temporary shortfall due to recent transformation processes and budget costs. However, someone mentioned to Nat Comms that your team is an absolute exemplar of diversity, so, they've decided to come along and film your team on a job, interview you all and me, and demonstrate that we've come a long way since the bad old days when you had to be an able-bodied white male to work in compliance." She winked at Frederick, which was an obvious waste of time and then made a clicking noise with her tongue while looking at Bell. She playfully punched Willy in the arm. Evon was glad that Steph didn't bother trying to bond with her using a cute gesture.

"What do you think of that, then?" Steph said. "Exciting times!"

Evon nodded. She was very impressed. Bell was a genius.

*

The team from Nat Comms consisted of around a half dozen beautifully dressed EL 1s. The women were young, thin and wore red-soled shoes. The men were young, thin and wore funky ties. None of them looked anything like public servants.

“All right,” Bell said. “This is going to be a simple job. The person of interest is a young man from India who has overstayed his student visa. The visa was auto-cancelled three months ago.” He pointed at the whiteboard that showed a diagram of an apartment building. Lots of small photographs were sticky taped around the diagram, showing amongst other things, a picture of the dud, a picture of a car, and a picture of the team. Nat Comms had insisted on having the whiteboard set up to emulate something from NCIS.

“I’ve arranged for the caretaker at the building to be available to let us into the apartment if Mr Walawalakar doesn’t open the door.”

One of the women from Nat Comms sniggered, displaying big shiny teeth. They were obviously veneers and were toilet bowl white. “Perhaps, we could find a better name for the person of interest,” she said. “Willy Whacker just doesn’t sound appropriate.”

Bell frowned and pointed at the board where the dud’s name was written in big blue letters. “His name is Walawalakar, Jo.”

“I know, Dan, but we don’t want to lose the audience in the first minute of footage. They’ll all be laughing.”

“I’d hope they’d have more maturity than that,” Bell said. “Anyway, I’ll refer to him as ‘Mr W’ from now on. Just for you, Jo.”

Evon thought it was stupid to change the man's name for such a ridiculous reason, but she also thought that Bell was incorrect about the maturity levels of her fellow immigration officers. She remembered when it was decided to rename the department as the "Department of Immigration and Citizenship", also known as "DIC". The press had a field day wondering if the head of the department would be known as the "DIC head". Also, she'd worked in a previous area known as "Program Integrity Support Section". The branch head, who had chosen the name, had insisted that immigration officers were mature enough not to notice that the acronym was impolite. He'd been quite disappointed.

Another one of the Nat Comms people, a thirty-ish man with a tie covered in South Park characters, spoke up: "I'm concerned that the person of interest is from India. Our relations with India are very sensitive at the moment. The Indian media are lambasting Australia for our treatment of their nationals, you know, the so called curry bashings. Perhaps we could focus on a different nationality. Have you got a Chinese person of interest? Or perhaps a white person; the Irish are a good target."

The other Nat Comms people nodded.

"Sorry," Bell said. "This is the only job that we have lined up at the moment. It takes a lot of preparation to do one of these operations. We can't just switch to a different target. Anyway, this video is only for internal use, isn't it? It's not going on *Border Security* or anything."

"I suppose."

“Well, let’s get on with it,” Bell said. “Evon, you can interview Mr W. I’ll be the warrant holder. Willy, you can be note taker and first aid officer. Alex, you can guard the door.”

Alex put up his hand. It still had a yo yo in it. A green one. “Which door, Dan?”

Bell pointed at the diagram. “The apartment is just a long rectangle. It has a big window at the far end and a door at the other end. It has another door to the left, leading to a bedroom and a bathroom. We just need to guard the front door to make sure Mr W doesn’t make a run for it. Okay?”

“Got it!” Alex said.

Bell looked around at the group. “Any other questions?”

Alex put his hand up again. “What happens if the man tries to get out of the door?”

“Good question.” Bell chewed his lip. “You ask him to stop in a loud voice.”

“Got it!” He whizzed his yo yo up and down a few times. The Nat Comms guy with the video camera filmed its trajectory.

“What if he doesn’t stop?” Alex asked.

“You use reasonable force to stop him,” Bell said. “That means you just block his way.”

“Got it!”

*

Evon was wearing high heels and a black suit. She had bright red lipstick and so much mascara that her eyelashes were gluing her eyes shut. Apparently, this was the way Nat Comms wanted her to look on the video. "You need to look feminine," the Nat Comms stylist had said. "This video is about diversity. We need to show that ordinary girls can be on compliance teams. You know, nice girly girls."

"As opposed to butch, macho lesbians, you mean?" Evon said.

"Lesbians are lovely," the girl said. "But, we want to show that you don't have to be big and strong to work in compliance. You can be gentle and kind. You can be compassionate and humane. Humanity is one of the department's key values, Evon."

"Yes, I know."

The lift in the apartment building was broken. The team trailed up the stairs. Luckily, the apartment was only three storeys up, but it was hard going in the purple three inch high heel stilettos that had been lent to her by Emma, one of the Nat Comms girls.

Bell walked up to apartment number 345, followed by the team and by two Nat Comms people with video cameras. The hallway smelled quite deliciously of Indian food, perhaps Naan bread and Masala. Evon's mouth watered.

The hallway smelled good but it didn't look very attractive. The floor was covered in peeling lino, exposing water-stained concrete. The walls featured very amateur graffiti, consisting mostly of names and obscene cartoon depictions of genitalia. Most of the neon lights on the ceiling were broken. Only two were

operational and one of these was flickering. A bracket for a fire extinguisher hung crookedly from the wall, empty. The window at the end of the hall was broken with shards of glass glittering in the staccato light. Evon deduced that someone had wrenched the fire extinguisher from the wall and tossed it through the window. This was the typical place that the team found ex-student visa holders.

Bell knocked. Evon noticed a smear of what looked like blood on the white veneer of the door. “Hello,” he said.

The door opened. A thin young man peered through the crack in the door. “Yes?”

Bell held up his badge. “My name’s Daniel Bell. I’m from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. I need to speak to you, Mr Walawalakar, about your current visa status.”

Mr Walawalakar tried to slam the door shut, but Bell had his foot in the gap. “I have a warrant, sir.” He pushed the door open and the team went in.

The apartment was exactly as Bell had described. A long rectangle with a door at one end and a window at the other. There was one sofa, a book shelf, a tiny television and a play station. Nothing much else. On the wall, there was a pinboard with lots of photographs and postcards. At the centre of the pinboard was a picture of a rather round Indian woman with a very kindly smile—perhaps Mr Walawalakar’s mother.

Everyone was inside now. Alex stood by the door. He didn’t have his yo yo but he was holding his badge and smiling. Evon could see that he was proud to be doing something useful.

Bell sat down and patted the sofa. "Would you please take a seat, Mr Walawalakar? We need to talk and it might take a few minutes."

"No, no, I want to stand," Mr Walawalakar said. He was shaking a little and Evon couldn't help but notice how skinny he was. He didn't look like he'd eaten in a long time.

Bell shrugged. "Could you please tell me what visa you entered Australia on, sir?"

"Yes, yes. I can. It is a student visa. I am studying to be a chef. I want to become a chef and then become an Australian citizen. This is a beautiful country."

"Yes, it is. Could I see your passport, please?"

"Oh, it was stolen, sir." He held his hands out. "This is a very bad place to live. I have been robbed three times."

"Okay, well, I need to tell you that we're aware that your visa was auto-cancelled three months ago. Did you know that? You should have received a letter."

"No letter, sir. All my mail is stolen."

"Okay. That's unfortunate. Have you been attending school?"

"No, sir. Not this semester. I had no money for the fees. Everything was taken from me when I was robbed. But, I've been working and nearly have enough for the next semester."

“I’m afraid you no longer hold a visa, Mr Walawalakar. And, because your visa was cancelled, you are now excluded from applying for another temporary visa for three years. You’ll have to go home.”

Mr Walawalakar began pacing. “No, no. I cannot. My mother is so poor. And my father is dead. My mother saved up for me to come here. To have a better life. I cannot go home, sir.” His gaze shifted to the pinboard, confirming to Evon that the picture there was of his mother. “I cannot disappoint my family.” He rubbed his hands hard against his face. Evon could see that his fingernails were bitten right down to the cuticles. “I cannot go home. I must stay here and study.”

Mr Walawalakar was becoming very agitated. Evon wished that Bell had managed to persuade him to sit down. She went over and stood next to Alex. He might need some help if Mr Walawalakar decided to make a run for it.

Bell stood up. “I’m sorry, sir, but—”

Mr Walawalakar ran but he didn’t run for the door. He ran straight for the closed window and jumped straight through.

Bell bolted and ran out the apartment, clearly on his way to outside to help Mr Walawalkar. Frederick was already on the phone calling the emergency services. Alex was bent over, vomiting. Evon went over to him and patted his back with one hand. She patted him slowly and watched how her hand shook. “He’s all right, Alex,” she said. She intended her voice to sound strong and confident, but it wavered. She sounded like a little girl about to burst into tears. “He’ll be fine.” She hoped he would be.

Chapter fifteen

“I’ve been talking to Rose.” Evon sipped her water.

Raven’s expression altered slightly but Evon was unable to interpret it.

“She told me a few things about you.” Evon heard a bird squawking outside. It sounded like a cockatoo was being dismembered. “Told me some interesting things.”

The interview room was cold. The heating didn’t work very well in the detention centre. “She told me your name is ‘Raven’. Can I call you that?”

Raven’s face had reverted to its usual bland expression of amiability. She would give anything to know about his story. There were a thousand questions she’d like to ask him. But there was no point. He was silent. Perhaps, he would always be silent.

But, just when she had given up on receiving a response, he nodded. He actually communicated with her. She was momentarily breathless. “Will you talk to me?” She made a promise to herself. If he did speak to her, she would keep her promise to Rose. She would let him go.

No response. She rubbed her eyes hard. Everything seemed to be going wrong. She thought about Alex. He had asked to be taken off the team and had returned to the mail room. He'd told her he couldn't work in compliance any more. It was too cruel. She thought about Mr Walawalakar. He had broken both his legs and one arm. He'd be flying home as quickly as the department could organise it. Before the media found out what had happened.

Raven drew a bead from a dreadlock and put it on the desk between them. It shone silver in the fluorescent light. Evon picked it up. It was unusual, like an aeroplane. No, it was a bird.

*

She awoke to a grey morning. The sun hid behind black clouds that threatened snow. Something warm and soft lay in her hand. She had dreamt she had been flying. She'd flown circuits around the Telstra Tower and joined a flock of sulphur-crested cockatoos. They'd surrounded her with their white wings and filled her head with their companionable squawking. It was as if she'd been surrounded by huge snowflakes. Like the snowflakes in the story her Dad used to read to her before he left.

She lay still in the bed, trying not to disturb her kitty who was sleeping near her feet. Mum had finally relented and let her have a cat. Her name was "Sherbet" because that was Evon's favourite lolly. She'd never been able to have a cat before because Dad was allergic to cat fur. Evon remembered how her Dad had

made jokes about eating pillows and how he had taken her to the beach. He had been gone a year now. Every morning when she woke up, she would lie in bed with her eyes closed and wonder if she would find him sitting in the kitchen drinking a cup of coffee and doing a crossword. Mum said he would never come back, but Evon still hoped he would. The soft warm thing in the palm of her hand shivered and twitched.

She sat up and brought her hand out from under the covers and uncurled her fingers. A tiny bird lay in the centre of her palm. A cockatoo. It was small. Much smaller than it should be. It resembled a child's attempt to construct a bird from a toilet roll, pipe cleaners and glue. It seemed to have three wings, a head with no eyes, two beaks. Its legs were lifeless sticks emblazoned with scales and claws. She dropped it and it tumbled slowly to the floor, twisting as it fell. It hit the carpet with a light thud, and to her horror it made a sound. A noise like a child crying for its mother. It was alive!

There was a knock on her bedroom door.

"Are you okay?" Mum asked.

"Yes." The bird's wails increased in intensity. Perhaps it was in pain.

"What's that noise?"

"Nothing." The bird flopped on the carpet, its many wings straggling, its claws catching in the shag pile. It sounded like a tortured baby.

"Evon? What's the problem?" The door was opening. "Are you upset?"

Evon grabbed her pillow and placed it on the bird. She pressed down hard. The bird struggled beneath her hands. "I'm fine."

Mum stood in the doorway, frowning. She held a rolled up newspaper in her hand. "What's under the pillow?"

"Nothing."

"Yes, there is." Mum took several steps closer. "What is it?"

"Nothing." Evon felt like she was going to vomit. Her skin was damp and she had a bad taste in her mouth. "A spider." Mum was terrified of spiders. The bird's movements were weaker now. "A big spider, Mum. A huntsman."

Mum took a step back. "I thought I heard a noise."

"Big spiders make noises. Like birds. I read it in National Geographic."

"I don't think so. Not like that."

"It was me. I was scared. I was sort of screaming. A bad dream." Evon swallowed bile. "It's just a spider."

"Let me see." She waved the newspaper. "I'm feeling brave. I'll squish it."

There was no movement from under the pillow and no sound. "Okay." Evon held her breath and carefully lifted the pillow.

"Nothing there." Mum backed away. "It must have escaped."

*

Evon looked at Raven. "But, we all have to sleep and we all have to dream."

*

She got on the bus. Alex was there, as usual, but he wasn't wearing his usual suit. He was just wearing jeans and a t-shirt. He looked at her but said nothing.

"Hi, Alex. Are you okay?" Like Raven, he said nothing at all. "Are you okay?" Why didn't he say: "Hi, Mum"?

"Won't you speak to me?"

Finally Alex spoke: "It's a bad job." He turned away and stared out the window.

"Alex, I'm sorry it turned out so badly. Mr W. is okay, though. He's going to get better." Images tumbled in her mind. The Chinese girl crying for her lost baby. Mr Tran lying paralysed in bed, destined for horrible death. Mr W leaping from the window. Rose sitting with her hand pressed against her eyes as if she were trying to stop her tears.

"I'm not working for immigration anymore," Alex said. He pointed to a bag at his feet. "I'm selling the *Big Issue* at the mall. On the white bridge."

"Okay."

"It's a bad place," Alex said. "You should leave too, before you get broken."

"I'm already broken," Evon said. "It's too late, I think."

"It's not too late." Alex looked at her. "You can get a new job. You can work with me. We can both sell the *Big Issue*."

"I'll think about it, Alex. I'll really think about it!"

*

Evon stood in front of National Office and shivered in a wind that swirled tornado-like around her feet. The building seemed to have been constructed so that the entrance would have as little light as possible. The building was basically shaped like an upside down "U" with the entrance nestling within. The courtyard outside the entrance was surrounded by walls of pale aluminium set with deep green window panes, slabs of glass like the sides of glaciers. A single weak ray of sunshine speared the air, terminating just above the Perspex letters that spelled out "Department of Immigration and Citizenship". The light shattered against the plastic, throwing an eerie greenish blue rainbow that reminded Evon of pictures she'd seen of the Northern lights.

The ground was layered with white blocks of concrete like a shattered lake. Blackened, leafless trees stood like sentinels. In the weak light that managed to filter into the courtyard, the trees glittered slightly.

A whole three days at National Office. Evon couldn't think of anything worse. She sat in the training room with Bell on one side and Willy on the other. Frederick sat next to Bell with a tape recorder set on the desk in front of him. Evon made a mental note to be careful what she said. There were about ten other officers in the room. All of them looked as if they were from National Office. Most of the women wore at least one strand of pearls.

"Welcome, people." The trainer was in her late forties and typical National Office. Clean, white, smarmy and wearing a skirt suit. She wore her immigration name badge and an ID holder that read "People. Our Business". If she'd worn

those in a state or territory office she'd have been instantly labeled a complete suck-up. She was an EL 1 even though her job was completely brainless and lacking in responsibility. Even the people who did the folioing and filing were executive level in National Office. "My name's Alberta Lapp," she said, and I'm very happy to be your facilitator today for a truly inspiring course that I hope will make your jobs much easier." She turned on the PowerPoint and a picture of smiling immigration officers appeared. There was one Asian female, one black man and a white man. "Good Decision Making for People".

"I can't wait for the sequel, 'Good Decision Making for Inanimate Objects'," Evon muttered to Bell. Why did everything have to have the word 'people' in it? Take the departmental motto: People. Our business. Was it to show that immigration was not an inhumane department with no idea of who its clients were? Was it to remind officers that their work directly impacted on people? Evon had a theory that slogans always reflected the opposite of the truth. "People. Our Business" meant "Our clients are just numbers on a page." And "Woolworth's the fresh food people" meant "We sell old rotten food." It was Orwellian.

The facilitator glanced at Evon's name tag. "Evon, would you like to share your comments with the group?"

"I said, this will be a fascinating and stimulating course," Evon said. "I'm very happy to have been given the opportunity to attend and I hope to learn a lot."

"Fabulous!" The trainer said. "That's a great attitude."

"She's known for her positive approach," Willy said. "She inspires us all."

"Good!" Alberta smiled blankly.

Bell's phone buzzed. "Sorry," he said. "I'll take it outside." He went out.

"Just a reminder, folks, we need to keep our mobiles turned off during the training course," Alberta said. "It's just a simple courtesy that will make the training experience all the more comfortable for everybody. Okay!"

Bell opened the door and gestured to Evon. "I need to speak to you for a moment."

Bell drew Evon over to the lush reception area. It was equipped with a kitchen, about twenty types of tea and coffee and countless varieties of cookie. There were garish artworks on the walls, big squashy sofas and coffee tables plastered with glossy magazines. Bell sat down on one of the sofas and Evon sat down beside him. "What's wrong?" Evon asked.

"Mr Tran just passed away."

It was ten days since they'd sent him back. He hadn't lasted very long. "How do you know?"

"I asked his sister to keep me updated. She got the embassy to tell me what happened. He choked to death last night. There was nothing his sister could do. She rang an ambulance but it didn't get there in time."

Evon's fingernails dug into the palms of her hands. She deliberately unclenched her fists and laid her hands flat on her thighs. "We knew it was likely. Inevitable, even."

"Yes, we knew."

But, they'd sent him back anyway. And he'd died. Choked. A hard death.

“Are you all right?” Bell asked.

“Don’t be stupid!” Evon stood up. “Of course, I’m all right. She went to stare at a print of a Sidney Nolan painting. The picture blurred then resolved itself into the depiction of a dog attacking a bleeding creature. “Why wouldn’t I be?” It was unclear what the creature was exactly. Some sort of alien perhaps. “What does it mean for us?”

“You mean for the department? Nothing.” Bell stood next to her. “His sister isn’t going to go to the Australian media. She’s not going to take it to the courts. She just accepts it. In any case, no one would be interested. No one cares, Evon.”

“You do.”

“I didn’t care enough to make a stand,” he said. “You didn’t see me going to the media. You didn’t see me protesting in the street, speaking to my local MP. You don’t even see me resigning and going to work for an organisation that has some concept of what it means to be human. I just draw my pay and watch people getting hurt.”

“Maybe you can make a difference.”

“I’ve been in compliance for six years now. It’s too long. I think every day I become a little more like the people I work with, Evon. Every single day.”

*

Day two of the training course. Evon stared out the window at the blue sky. The corners of the windows were laced with cobwebs and dust. A dead moth hung upside down from a web, spinning first clockwise then anti-clockwise.

"So, Evon," Alberta said. "Can you come up to the whiteboard, please, and explain to the group what the acronym SAFE AND CO stands for?" She handed Evon a whiteboard marker. "As you know from yesterday's session, SAFE AND CO is a useful model that helps officers make ethical and lawful decisions in their roles as decision makers. Evon?"

Evon wrote a big "S" on the whiteboard. "SAFE AND CO stands for the following: Silly And Foolish Ethical Atrocities Need Dumping on Compliance Officers."

Alberta stared at Evon for a long moment then managed to force herself to laugh. "Ha! Very witty, Evon. Of course, though, SAFE AND CO actually stands for ..." She grabbed the marker pen from Evon and waved her back to her seat. "Sensible! Appropriate! Fair! Ethical! ..."

Evon wrote on her note pad: *I want to die*

Bell read it and wrote: *Kill me now.*

"You may confront some difficult situations in the field," Alberta said. "Has any one of you ever been offered a bribe?"

Silence.

"No volunteers?"

No one was stupid enough to speak. To admit to being offered a bribe would almost certainly result in a Values and Conduct investigation.

“So, what would you do if someone offered you \$100 to turn a blind eye to the fact that they didn’t have a visa? What would you do?”

Evon wrote: *Tell them the going rate was \$1500.*

At lunchtime, the team went to the local pizza place. Evon felt on edge. The business monitoring unit had raided this restaurant about six months ago and discovered several workers being exploited under the temporary business visa program. She made sure her badge wasn’t visible.

“Let’s have a carafe of Lambrusco,” Willy said. “The best you have.”

“I don’t think we should drink during working hours,” Bell said. “Especially when we’re at a National Office attending a training course called ‘Good Decision Making for People’”.

“I think it’s a good decision to have a drink,” Willy said. “A very good decision for people.”

“I agree,” Frederick said. “One drink each will help us all relax.”

“I guess I’m outvoted,” Bell said. “Waiter!”

Evon rested her head on the table. A fork stuck into her cheek. They were on their sixth carafe of Lambrusco and their third serving of pizza. The men were holding up really well but she had overdone it. She was at the stage where the room was

spinning. The place was packed with customers despite the bad publicity caused by immigration. There were women laughing, children running around, babies crying. The heating was turned up high and it was too hot. Evon felt sweat running down her forehead. She was melting.

"You look tired." Bell said. "Are you having a sleep on the table?"

"I'm fine," she said. "Just fine." What if her mother could see her now? She'd give her a detailed lecture on the detrimental effect of excess alcohol on the human brain. "Glad Mum's not here to see this." She felt a sharp pang in her chest. Why had she mentioned Mum? It was the last thing she wanted to think about.

"What about your Dad?" Bell asked. "What would he think of all this?"

"I have no idea. I haven't spoken to him since I was six years old."

"Why not?"

"He never called." That was a lie. He had called hundreds of times for the first few years. Then he had rung every birthday, every Easter, every Christmas. She refused to speak to him. He had left her. She hated him. Actually, she didn't hate him. She felt nothing. And that was the way she liked it.

"Oh. I see." He took a breath as if he were going to ask some more questions. Evon closed her eyes and willed him to be silent.

"The wine is corked!" Willy shouted. "Waiter! Look at this."

The waiter came over and picked up Willy's glass. He glanced at the contents. "Sir, this wine came out of a cask. It can't be corked."

"Oh, terrific! Well, let's have another carafe, then!"

“Seriously, Evon, are you all right? Evon?” Bell leant close. He smelled of pizza and wine. His hair had come loose and looked as if it were about to dangle in the remains of Evon’s vegetarian pizza.

“Watch out!” She took hold of the strand of hair. It was warm against her skin and heavier than she would have expected. “Keep it out of my dinner.” She pushed it behind his ear. His skin was hot and damp.

“You actually touched me. With your hand. You must be feeling unwell.”

“Fine,” Evon said. “I’m really fine.” She lifted her head. “Look, it’s dark already! Oh, dear, we’ll be late for the course. What a terrible tragedy!”

“The humanity!” Bell said. “The horror!”

“Short days in winter,” Frederick said. Evon stared at him. His pale freckled skin was a little flushed but he didn’t look drunk at all despite matching the others drink for drink. Spookily, as if he knew she was looking at him, he smiled at her.

Evon didn’t know whether or not to smile back. “It’s the middle of spring,” she said. “Supposedly.” The word “supposedly” seemed strangely difficult to pronounce. She lifted her glass. The light shone through the wine and made it glow like the sky at sunset. “A toast to winter. May it be eternal!”

“To eternity!” Bell said. They knocked their glasses together. Lambrusco splashed red onto the table top.

The word “eternity” echoed in Evon’s head. It reminded her of her Dad.

"I'll cook dinner tonight," Mum had got home earlier from the surgery than usual. She looked a bit flushed and was carrying several plastic bags. She was wearing a necklace that looked like a snake. Apparently, it was made of Whitby jet and was Victorian mourning jewellery. "I've got something special in mind."

Evon and Dad looked at each other. Usually, Dad cooked dinner as he always got home from work before Mum. "I thought I'd cook some Thai, tonight," he said.

"I have something more exciting in mind," Mum said. "I thought of it while I was lancing an abscess today." She brushed a strand of her shiny black hair back from her face. "Not that my idea has anything to do with anything that gross."

"Thank goodness," Dad said. He winked at Evon. "Let's leave your Mum to it. We can play Scrabble while she's cooking."

Evon set up the game. Seven tiles for her. Seven tiles for Dad. The good thing about playing with Dad was that he usually let her win. Mum always beat Evon. She said it would be patronising to lose. Evon didn't know what she meant by that but she did know that she would rather play Scrabble with Dad than with Mum. "What do you think she'll cook?"

"I don't know," Dad said. "But, I'm pretty scared. How about you?"

"Yep," Evon said. "Really scared." She remembered the time that Mum had decided that it would be fun to have "Random Stew". She peeled all the labels off the cans in the cupboard and then tipped the contents of six cans into a saucepan. She served it on a bed of rice. Evon had only been able to recognise canned spaghetti, pineapple rings, asparagus spears and beetroot.

“If it’s too awful, I’ll order pizza.” Dad put down the word “tern”.

“What’s that?” Evon asked.

“Some type of bird,” Dad said. “A seabird, think.”

Evon added “e” to one side and “ity” to the other. “Eternity,” she said. “Like in the Snow Queen.”

“Big word. Nice try.” He bit his lip. “But, I don’t think you can add letters to two sides of a word.”

“Oh.” Evon removed the tiles. There was a big bang from the kitchen, and Mum shouted out: “I need a bigger saucepan.”

Dad went to help her. “The big pan’s under the sink, CC,” he said.

Evon sat with her legs crossed and stared at the Scrabble board. It reminded her of the lake of broken ice in the story. The tiles were like fragments of ice and the game was a puzzle just like the lake was a puzzle. She put back the letters that spelled out the word “eternity”. If she were Kay, she would be free now.

Evon stared at her plate. There was some sort of big green cucumber thing sitting on a bed of blue and green jelly. They each had one. “Oh,” she said. “What are they?”

“Look closely,” Mum said. She picked up her cucumber thing, carefully, in two hands. Droplets of jelly dripped onto the table cloth. Evon saw Dad flinch. She knew he was thinking about how hard it would be to get the blue stain off the white material. He did most of the housework because Mum worked so hard at the

surgery. Evon looked around the kitchen. It was a big mess. She would help Dad clean it up if she had time before going to bed.

“Look!” Mum said. “I’ve even carved little scales into it.”

“It’s a work of art, CC,” Dad said. “Almost too good to eat.”

Evon examined the cucumber thing carefully. It was pretty amazing. It was carved into a creature. It had a mouth on one end with jagged teeth. A wobbly orange carrot, cut to resemble a tongue, hung out of the creature’s mouth. The spine of the animal had jagged stegosaurus plates and its eyes were made of peas set into carved out eye sockets. “I still don’t know what it is.”

“Clearly, it is a zucchini monster salad,” Mum said. “I used my second best scalpel.”

“Zucchini monsters. What a great idea!” Dad said. “Let’s eat!”

Evon shook her head. She still hated zucchinis no matter how they were sliced.

“You know,” Frederick said. “There’s something I really need to tell you guys. Now that we’re all mates. He pursed his lips. “I hope you’re open minded.”

Evon struggled to focus her eyes on him. “What’s that then?”

“I just thought you should all know that I’m gay.”

Evon sniggered. “Great. You’re sort of a two-for-one offer. We can have a gay guy and a blind guy on the team for the price of one. Yay, diversity!”

Frederick smiled. “So, you don’t mind?”

“I don’t care,” Evon said. “Do you care, Willy?”

“No.” Willy drained his glass. “Less competition for the chicks.”

“What about you, Bell?” Frederick asked.

“Well, I already suspected.” Bell said. “Anyway, I welcome gayness. I celebrate the uniqueness of every individual.” He grabbed Frederick’s hand. “Welcome to compliance!”

“On a more serious note.” Bell stood. “I want to make a toast.” He held up his glass. “To Mr Tran,” he said softly. “May we be forgiven.”

“To forgiveness,” Evon said slowly and quietly. The others echoed her.

“I think we should do something to make sure we never forget this,” Willy said. “I have an idea --“

*

Day three of the training course. Evon felt like shit. Her head hurt, her stomach hurt, her wrist hurt as if sunburnt. She stared at the big white bandage that covered the tattoo. She’d put the bandage on this morning before Robert got up. What would Robert say when he found out? Lord, he’d be outraged. Maybe he wouldn’t have minded if she’d got a tattoo of a spaceship or the Star Trek symbol.

It had been darn hard to persuade the tattooist to do the work. She’d said they were too drunk. Somehow, Bell had persuaded her otherwise.

“So, let’s say you were presented with an ethical dilemma,” Alberta said. She was wearing browny green eye shadow that gathered in the creases around her eyes like lichen. “I’ll give you a scenario.” She pulled out a sheet of paper from a folder and read: “You log in to a shared data base, an Excel spreadsheet used

for booking departmental vehicles. You leave the office to conduct an employer awareness session. While you're speaking to the employer, your mobile rings. You answer it. It's your supervisor. He says that no one can get into the data base because you're logged in to it. He asks you if you can give him your password so he can log into your account and close down the spreadsheet. What do you do?"

Bell raised his hand. His long-sleeved shirt, purple silk with gold fleur-de-lis, covered his tattoo on his wrist. "I call IT Support and ask them to close down the spreadsheet for me."

Alberta looked at her sheet of paper and then turned it over. "Ah, good idea. Let's suppose you can't get through to IT Support."

"That's quite likely," Evon said. "I was on hold for 206 minutes once. Even when I got through to them, they couldn't help me."

Willy said, "I have this idea. I use an obscene word for a password, that way—"

Evon groaned. How many times had Willy mentioned his psycho method of choosing passwords? He was driving her insane. Last night, he'd chickened out. It was his idea but when they'd got to the tattoo parlour, he'd said he was scared of needles. They made him faint.

"So," Alberta continued. Let's apply the RESPECT acronym to analyse this ethical dilemma."

Lord, how many acronyms did they have to remember to make a simple decision? And the scenario was pathetic. It was obviously contrived by someone who had never been presented with any real ethical dilemmas.

Evon imagined an improved scenario for the group's consideration. You find two duds in a brothel. One won't talk. The other one talks too much. You suspect they have a relationship with each other. Do you promise that you'll release the man if she talks? Do you blackmail the talkative one so that she will give you her biodata? Or do you play by the book?

Or you detain a pregnant girl. She's crying in the car as you take her to detention. Do you set her free or do you lock her up?

What about a paralysed man? Do you send him home to die?

What about an Indian student whose parents have sacrificed everything so he can get an education? Do you give him a visa or watch him jump out a window?

"You should never tell anyone your password," Frederick said. "It's a security breach to do so." He had a tattoo as well. It was a different design to Evon and Bell's. Frederick said the tattooist must have made a mistake. His tattoo depicted two wavy lines, an obvious representation of the sea.

Evon put her hand gently on the bandage around her wrist. She thought she felt her pulse throbbing beneath her palm. Bell looked at her. He touched his own wrist, mirroring her. Then he pushed a piece of paper over to her. She read it:

A cold smile freezes

Crystallised in memory

I forget to love

She frowned at him. Nice haiku but what was his point? She wrote back:

A smile like a slug

Frozen to the glacial ice

Dissolves and moves on

Bell read it and smiled. "Funny!"

"Time for a break," the trainer said. "You've got ten minutes."

"Bell, can we talk for a minute?"

"Of course." He waved at the rest of the team. "Grab a coffee. I'll see you in a minute." He led the way, opening the door for Evon. They stood outside, upwind of a group of smokers. Evon could still smell the acrid scent of cigarette smoke. A strong wind blew around the corner of the building and Evon felt goosebumps rise on her bare arms.

"What's up?" Bell asked. "Is it about the other night?" He pointed to his wrist. "The tatt?"

"No, not that." Evon felt like she didn't know what to do with her hands. "It's about Rose. I've arranged her removal for next Wednesday."

"Good work! Are you accompanying her?"

"Yes."

"I'll come, too."

“Why do you want to?” Evon’s wrist itched and felt hot. She wanted to tear off the bandage.

“Why not?” He looked at her steadily then leant close. “What are you thinking, Evon?”

“Rose said you were one of her regular customers.” The words sounded really stupid. “She called you Danny.”

“Firstly, no one calls me ‘Danny’.” Bell laughed. “Not even my Grandma. And secondly, you should know the working girls always say stuff like that. Don’t you remember the time that girl at Number 69 told Willy that you worked there and that you had dobbed her in because you were annoyed that you weren’t getting the rich clients?” He reached out and touched Evon’s hand, just the tips of her fingers. “I’m not into whips and stuff, Evon. I like my love life gentle and painless.”

Evon folded her arms. “Why would she say it?”

“She must have thought it would upset you for some reason. In her job, she has to be really good at reading people. She’s just teasing you.” His phone buzzed. He reached into his pocket and turned it off. “It does upset you, doesn’t it?”

“I’m not upset. It’s just a conflict of interest. Like with Willy and Mirjeta. I’ll get the warrant application ready when we get back to the office.”

“Okay.” He took out his phone and switched it on. “And there’s no conflict of interest with Willy and Mirjeta. I’ve given her case to Frederick. He seems an objective sort of fellow.”

Tess looked up from her Lego. She was building a construction which she called, "Baby World". "I dreamt about you. Last night."

Evon put down her book. "Did you?" She knew she should ask what Tess had dreamed but the words refused to emerge from her mouth.

"Yes, it was a funny dream." Tess picked up a Lego man and placed it next to a Lego woman. "I laughed." Tess picked up a Lego baby and made it walk over to the Lego woman. She made it put its hands up in the air as if it wanted to be picked up.

Evon heard Robert talking on the kitchen phone to one of his science fiction fanatic friends. "Nah, *Farscape* was better, mate. I loved that little guy, Rigel—"

"Oh, yes." Tess frowned. "It was funny." Tess was concentrating on planting tiny Lego flowers.

"How was it so funny?" Evon picked up her book but lost hold of it. It fell onto the carpet. Tess handed it up to her.

Tess grabbed up the Lego baby and Lego man and tossed them into the Lego container. "I dreamt you were gone. We were all alone. Daddy and I were very sad. I was crying."

Evon's wrist itched. She was wearing long sleeves so the tattoo wasn't visible. What would she do in summer? The tattoo would be impossible to hide. So far, Robert hadn't noticed it. How would she explain it?

“I wouldn’t leave you.” There was a moment of silence. Robert had stopped talking on the phone. “Not ever.”

For an instant, it was as if the house were empty. It was very quiet. No laughing child. No bright colours. No music and no DVDs. Just an empty sterile house decorated in shades of ivory and shades of palest blue. An empty house with too many rooms, all of them vast, icily cold and dazzlingly white. “I won’t go.”

Tess laughed. “Yes, you have us and we have you!” She again tried to make a Lego flower stand up. It fell over. “Bad flower!”

Evon picked the flower up and twisted it between her fingers. It had bright red petals and yellow centre.

Robert came in. He was eating a piece of toast. Evon could smell the peanut butter that was on it. “What do you think of Rigel, Evon? He’s funny, isn’t he?” He stopped abruptly. “What’s that?”

“What?” She could see he was staring at her wrist. Her sleeve had ridden up a little.

“What have you done?” Robert grabbed her arm and pushed her sleeve all the way up. “I thought you hated tattoos.” His fingers traced the edges of the snowflake. “Why wouldn’t you have mentioned this?”

She pulled away. “Because it doesn’t matter.”

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"I'm not sure why I got a tattoo," Frederick said. "There doesn't seem much point when I can't see it myself. If I hadn't been so drunk, I might have asked the tattooist about those Braille tattoos that are supposed to be available."

"Really, Braille?" Willy winked at Evon, and swapped his empty glass of beer with Frederick's full one. "How does that work?"

"Some sort of subcutaneous implant."

"You could always have the Braille added afterwards," Bell said. "The puzzle is why didn't you get the same tattoo as the rest of us?"

"I dunno, mate. Maybe the tattooist was having a bit of fun at my expense." He swapped his glass with Willy's. "Some people like to do that."

"So," Bell said. "Frederick, do you have a partner or are you single?"

"Single. It's not so easy to get a boyfriend when you're blind. People assume I'm helpless and they'll have to take care of me."

"Shame!" Bell took out his mobile to check the time. "Maybe I could fix you up with someone. I know some nice single gay guys."

"I'm not desperate," Frederick said. "Though it does get a bit lonely sometimes."

"Where's Mirjeta? She's always so late," Willy said. "She was supposed to be here an hour ago."

"What do you expect from a princess?" Evon said.

"I'm sorry, what's that supposed to mean?"

“I’m not being mean,” Evon said. “It’s just that the way she talks about her life she makes it sound like a fairy tale. You know with evil husbands and ogres. It makes me think of ‘Beauty and the Beast’ or ‘Bluebeard’”.

“Her father’s the evil ogre,” Frederick said.

“I don’t know about that.” Evon drank some cider. “Seems to me there’s more to that story than meets the eye.”

“What do you mean?” Willy said. “Her father’s a violent alcoholic arsehole. Mirjeta’s terrified of going home. She reckons he’ll kill her.”

“He didn’t kill her the last time she rejected a husband and went home in disgrace.”

“He psychologically abused her and then he sold her again, to another man. It’s fucking barbaric.” Willy ran his fingers through his thin blonde hair. “I’m really worried. I can’t believe there’s no visa for her. Her father’s fucking evil. How can he treat such a sweet girl in such a disgusting way?”

“She’s hardly a girl,” Evon said. “She’s in her thirties.”

Bell shrugged. “She looks much younger. You’d think she was about twenty.”

“She sounds about thirty to me,” Frederick said. “Nice accent.”

“Seriously, guys, I don’t know what to do. I know the AFP have decided not to proceed but I really think she was trafficked.”

"What about her two sisters?" Evon said. "Were they trafficked? Mirjeta's dad arranged their marriages, too. They seem pretty happy with their lives here, with their husbands and their children."

"That's got nothing to do with it."

"Honestly, Willy, think about it. We're not talking about trafficking here. We're talking about arranged marriages. Heaps of cultures do it."

"Well, it's wrong."

Bell shook his head. "I don't approve either, but some cultures work like that. It's not for us to judge."

Evon leant forward. "Like I said, her sisters seem happy enough. It just didn't work out for Mirjeta."

"I'd do anything to help her." Willy checked his watch. "Anything."

"I know what you're thinking," Evon said. "Don't do it." Surely, he couldn't be in love with Mirjeta so quickly.

"She needs to be protected from her father. I'd like to get my hands around her father's neck and squeeze hard," Willy said.

There was a moment's silence.

"Look at it from her father's point of view," Evon said. "He's got three daughters. He wants to give them a good life, opportunities, health, money, a future. But he lives in a complete bum hole of a country. So, he manages to find two of them nice rich husbands in Australia. He finds Mirjeta a nice husband in the USA."

“Mirjeta’s not happy with this. She misses her sisters. So, she goes home to Dad and tells him her husband beat her. Dad sorts everything out. Pays for her divorce. Finds a new husband for her in Australia with her sisters.

“Sure, the husband is not prime real estate. He’s a bit ‘different’ but he’s a good fellow, not violent. Hell, she only has to put up with him for two years then she can get PR, get divorced and find a new man. Anyway, she’s not prime real estate either. She’s a divorcee and not so young any more.

“Mirjeta meets her husband and chucks a sad. She doesn’t want to look after an autistic husband and a sick mother-in-law. She’s a princess and deserves better.”

“What a load of bullshit,” Willy said. “Absolute bull.”

“You can’t judge her, Evon,” Bell said. “She’s a nice girl. Let’s show a bit of understanding, eh. Give Willy some support. This is a difficult time for him.”

“Yeah, leave him alone,” Frederick said. “It’s his life.”

“All right. I suppose so.” Evon looked around. In the dim light, the Palace looked quite impressive. The gilt was glittering, the red velvet looked plush, and the plastic chandeliers looked like Waterford crystal. If she squinted she could almost imagine she were in a king’s palace in Versailles. “I’m sorry, Willy. I was just running off at the mouth.”

The door swung open and Mirjeta walked in. She stood for an instant in the doorway as if expecting applause then spotted the team and came over. She was wearing a gold sequined cocktail dress, gold stilettos and a huge sparkly

rhinestone necklace, bracelet and earring parure. Evon couldn't resist. "Here comes Princess Mirjeta. You going somewhere special afterwards, Willy?"

"She looks hot!" Willy looked down at his own outfit. He was dressed in his usual checked shirt, moleskins and desert boots.

Mirjeta stood next to Willy. "Hello, Willy." She smiled at the others. "Hello."

Willy was staring at Mirjeta with an expression of absolute love. Despite herself, Evon found it sweet.

Bell kicked the leg of Willy's chair and cleared his throat.

Willy frowned at Bell. "What?"

"How are you all today?" Mirjeta was also frowning. Why didn't she sit down?

Bell stood up and offered her his chair. Mirjeta smiled and sat. "You are a gentleman, Mr Bell."

"Why, thank you, Miss Bizi," Bell said in a Southern accent. He saw Willy glaring at him and quickly dropped the accent. "You're welcome." He glanced around with a slightly desperate expression. "Evon, want to dance?"

Evon raised both eyebrows. "What do you think?" She wasn't the dancing type.

"Oh, come on." Bell stood up. He ushered her away from the group and whispered. "If I stay there, Willy will think I'm flirting with Mirjeta. Just pretend to be dancing with me for a few minutes."

“How do you pretend to dance?” Evon swayed slightly. “This is ridiculous. Can’t we just go back and sit down. You could just exercise some self restraint and refrain from flirting with Mirjeta for an hour or so.”

“I don’t flirt. Not ever.” Bell glanced over Evon’s shoulder. “I hope Willy can handle that girl.”

“I’m sure she can handle him.”

“Look, why don’t we just leave? I don’t think Willy will mind and Frederick can do his own thing,” Bell said. “Let’s go for a walk.”

Anything was better than the dancing. “All right.” They went out on to the street. The night was clear and bright with a half moon lighting up the sky. The trees that lined the road had sprouted leaves which shone like tiny green fairy lamps under the moon light.

“How’s your tattoo?” Bell asked. “Is it still sore?”

“No, it’s scabbed over now.” Evon wrapped her arms around herself. “I don’t know why we did it.”

“It’s a nice tattoo, though, considering we designed it ourselves while completely drunk.”

“It’s just embarrassing.” Robert was being quite cold towards her now. He kept asking why she got the tattoo, but she couldn’t reply. She didn’t know why.

“Evon, remember when we were in the Palace some time ago. I said that I didn’t know much about you. Well, I’d like to know a bit more.” Bell’s boots creaked as he walked. “You seem sad. Is everything okay at home?”

Well, that was to the point. "I'm not sure." Robert and Tess seemed very distant and very insubstantial.

"That's rather equivocal," Bell said. "Yes or no?"

"I don't know. I can't think about it. Robert is a good man. Tess is perfect."

"Why are you unhappy?"

"I don't know, Bell. I'm not sure I am unhappy. It's just that all I think about is work and the stuff that happens. I don't seem to have any room inside me for anything else."

"Do you love Robert?"

Evon felt her stomach clench. "Yes, but he seems so far away, like a million miles away. It was different once. We used to laugh all the time. Once we went to a science fiction convention together. I painted my whole body blue and went as an Orion slave girl from *Star Trek* and Robert dressed up as Captain Kirk. Now we hardly ever see each other. We don't go out. We hardly speak. I speak to you more than I do to my own family. I feel like I have nothing. Just nothing."

"It sounds like you have a lot, Evon. You have a husband, a child. You're loved. You know what it means to care for someone, to be happy, to be kind."

"I think I'm losing it all," Evon said.

Bell stopped walking. He took her left hand and ran his fingers over her wedding ring. "Don't lose it," he said. "Fight for it."

"I don't know how," Evon said. "It's just evaporating away, like a dream."

Chapter sixteen

They had to wait thirty-five minutes at the airport. Rose sat in the departure lounge with Bell on one side and Willy on the other. In her suit and pearls, she looked like a public servant flying to Sydney for business.

Frederick was playing with a Rubik's cube. "So, how's it going with you and Mirjeta?"

"It's pretty serious," Willy said. "She's special. Not like the others."

"What others?" Evon asked. "She's the only bonk you've had in the whole time I've known you."

"Don't talk like that!" Willy crunched the mint. It sounded like he was chewing on bones. "She's a lady."

"That means you haven't bonked her yet," Evon said. There were two minutes to go.

"She's not the type to do that. She doesn't believe in sex before marriage."

Evon laughed. Out the corner of her eye, she saw that Frederick was trying not to smile.

"Where did you and Bell go last night?" Willy asked. "You didn't even say goodbye."

"We thought you and Mirjeta needed some time alone together."

"I asked her to marry me."

Frederick was the first to recover. "Congratulations! That's wonderful! She's a lovely girl."

"Yes, I'm lucky. We're going to buy an engagement ring together on Saturday." He smiled. "She's so cute. She wants a pink heart-shaped diamond from the Argyle mines in WA. I didn't even know you could get pink diamonds."

"Sounds like she knows her diamonds." Evon watched a plane take off through the observation window. It rose into the air like a big white cockatoo and circled away to the south.

An airport security officer came up. "Do you want one of us to go with you on the plane?"

"No, thanks," Bell said. "I think we'll be fine. We'd rather not be obtrusive."

"Okay, no worries." He went off.

"I can't go home." Rose jumped up. Clearly, she was going to run, but Frederick grabbed her arm. "I'm sorry," he said. He cuffed her wrists to the front. "Maybe you do need security to go with you, Bell. Or we could get a ticket for me, too."

"No, it's too late for that," Bell said. "Anyway, we'll be fine."

"All right," Frederick said. "But you need to keep a close eye on this one."

"I know." Bell glanced at Rose. "Do you want something to cover the cuffs?"

She nodded.

Bell asked. "Evon, can I have your cardigan?"

"You've got to be joking," Evon said. "This is one of my favourite cardies."

"Just give it to me."

"Lord!" Evon took off her creamy white jumper and gave it to him. Bell draped it over Rose's handcuffs, tucking it around them carefully so it looked as if she were holding the cardigan.

"You've got to allow clients some dignity," Bell said to Evon.

"Not with my jumper."

Rose settled back into her seat. She was breathing hard and trembling but was clearly managing to regain some equilibrium. It occurred to Evon that it might be hard for a dominatrix to be restrained. She felt like making a comment about how the shoe was on the other foot, but something about Rose's trembling stopped her from speaking. "You're very handsome," Rose said to Frederick. "I like redheads. Do you work out?"

"Every day."

"It's a shame I'm going home. I'd let you visit me for nothing."

"I'm sure you're a very beautiful woman, but there are two things. One, I'm a public servant and I believe in the code of conduct. And two, I'm gay."

"That's a shame. We could have had some fun."

Rose was quiet on the flight to Sydney, which was pretty much what Evon had expected. In her experience, clients remained controllable until put on the international flight. It wasn't until then that they realised departure was inevitable.

Evon sat with her as they waited to board the plane to Johannesburg. Dan and Frederick went off to the duty free.

"Let's talk," Rose said. "I want to tell you what we did."

"What do you mean?"

Rose's tone was comically dark. "I mean, I want to talk about Danny."

"Oh, stop it! I'm not interested."

"You are interested."

"Believe me, I'm not."

Rose fell silent but held Evon's gaze. Evon saw her eyelashes were wet and hoped she wasn't about to start howling.

"Evon," Rose said in quite a different tone. "Why don't you just let me go free? I cannot go back."

Evon tried to imagine why Rose might not want to go home. "It's just South Africa," Evon said. "It's not like we're sending you into a war zone." Yet, they never went back willingly. It would seem they would do anything to stay in Australia, pay any price.

"Just let me go. I beg you."

Evon's fingers slipped into her pocket and played with a tiny key. The key to the handcuffs. "What you said about Bell. Is it true?"

Rose's eyes flicked to the left. Evon followed her gaze. Frederick and Bell were coming back. Evon pulled her hand out of her pocket. She stared at her own fingers, pale and thin. She almost expected the key to be there. It was easy to imagine slipping it into the keyhole, twisting it, opening the handcuffs, taking back her cardigan, watching Rose walk away. It was very easy to imagine. She made a bet with herself. If Rose had admitted that she was lying about Bell, then she'd let her go.

"Of course, it's true," Rose said. "He likes his women very cold, like corpses. That is how he rolls."

Bell and Frederick were back. "I bought you both a present," Bell said. He gave Evon a lollypop. "It's strawberry flavoured."

"Where's mine?" Rose asked.

"I'll give it to you on the plane once we've taken the cuffs off. Don't worry, you won't miss out."

They were allowed to board the plane ahead of the other passengers.

"I'll just go and talk to the captain," Bell said. "I'll explain the situation to him and see if he's comfortable with us taking off Rose's cuffs during the flight."

Evon sat next to Rose. "Are you close to your family in South Africa?"

"No." Rose closed her eyes. "I don't have any family."

"Oh, okay." Evon saw the captain come out of the cockpit and look down the aisle towards them. "What happened to them?"

"They died when I was small. I was twelve."

"Oh." The other passengers were boarding. They blocked the aisles as they wrestled their carry-on luggage into the overhead compartments. "I'm sorry."

Rose just closed her eyes.

Evon took out the in flight magazine and flipped through it. Adverts for opal jewellery, adverts for perfume, a crossword and a Sudoku.

"What about my house and all my things?" Rose asked. "What will happen to them?"

"You'll have to arrange something from Africa." Evon looked around for Bell. He was taking a while. She spotted him near the galley chatting to a flight attendant. She smiled and touched his arm then moved away. Another fan of Daniel Bell.

Rose met her eye. "You like him a lot, Evon. Too much."

"We're colleagues. Nothing more."

"I think there is more." Rose was silent for a moment. When she spoke her voice was very low. "Will you keep your promise?"

"Of course." Evon felt her stomach twist. Why had she lied? What did it matter if she solved one more case, sent one more dud home, cancelled one more visa, located one more UNC? None of it mattered. She thought of Raven. He sat

there in the detention cell and heard her speak. He listened to her. He listened and he didn't judge. "Why doesn't he speak, Rose? Who is he to you? Your lover?"

Rose stared at her. Evon wondered if she could see that Evon had lied to her. Rose's gaze was like an ice pick, cutting her to the core. "He is my brother, Evon. Four years younger than I. I've always tried to look after him."

Bell returned and Rose fell silent. "The captain says we can remove the restraints once we take off, providing she's behaving herself." He sat next to Rose. "Are you comfortable?"

"This isn't fair, Danny. It just isn't fair." Rose held her wrists to her face. "This hurts me."

"I'll take them off as soon as I can," Bell said. "I can loosen them a little." He looked at Evon. "Have you checked them to see if they're too tight?"

"They're fine. I've been checking them every twenty minutes, just like I'm supposed to."

"No, not my wrists. You're hurting my heart."

Evon snorted. "Sure! Poor little Rose. I guess you're not used to being the one to wear the cuffs, eh?"

"Be quiet," Bell said. "Just be quiet, Evon."

A flight attendant went through the safety drill. Evon started to fill out the cryptic crossword in the magazine. Bell watched the flight attendant.

Rose reached out and touched Evon's arm. "I don't want to go. My life is here. I have nothing in South Africa. Nothing. I am afraid. I cannot go back. I have enemies there and bad memories."

Evon wanted to ask what Raven had seen. What had silenced him? But the words would not leave her lips. "When you get back, make a proper visa application," she said. "You can come back on a permanent visa if you qualify. The exclusion period only applies for three years and only for temporary visas."

"I don't have any chance of getting a visa."

"You said you had a Master's degree. That will help. "Rose would most likely simply get a false passport and come back that way. There was one Korean girl who had been returned to her own country six times on six different passports.

Evon filled in another clue. Lord, she wasn't sure she could stand hours of this. This was only the third time she'd escorted a client back to their own country.

"When will you take the handcuffs off?"

"As soon as the plane takes off. If you're good," Evon said. "You can have your lollypop then."

"I'm not a little child, Evon."

"I realise that."

The flight attendant came back and handed Bell two small bags. "To make your trip a bit more comfortable," she said.

"What did she give you?"

“Those bags that they give to people in business class. With complementary socks, toothbrushes and all that. She’s very sweet.” He handed Evon one of the bags. Evon stuffed it down the side of the seat. “Thanks.” She tipped her seat back and shut her eyes.

“Evon!” It was Bell. “Wake up!”

Evon opened her eyes. She looked at her hands. There was a snowflake on her wrist. A delicate white snowflake intricately detailed, crystalline, perfect. It nestled in the centre of a red and orange sun. Why didn’t it melt? “What?” She realised she was looking at her tattoo.

“We’ve been in the air for three hours. Rose wants to go the bathroom.”

“Why didn’t you wake me up earlier?”

“You looked like you needed the rest. Both of us don’t need to be awake at the same time.”

“Oh, thanks.” Evon saw that Bell had already taken off Rose’s handcuffs. She got her backpack down from the overhead compartment and took out a thick piece of dowel. “Come on, Rose.”

Rose stood up. In her suit, with her pearls and immaculate hair, she looked more reputable than Evon. Evon noticed with irritation that Rose was now wearing her cardigan.

She waited until there was no one else waiting at the bathroom then escorted Rose down the aisle. When they got to the door of the lavatory, Rose took hold of Evon's wrist. "Do you know what African men believe?"

Evon was impatient. She just wanted Rose to hurry up so they could return to their seats. "No, what?"

"They believe that if they have sex with a virgin then they can be cured from AIDS. Did you know that?"

"No." And it wasn't a topic she wanted to discuss.

"I need to tell you. I need to tell you now. I want you to know why I can't go home. I was raped, Evon. When I was a little girl. I was twelve. Raven saw it happen. He was only eight years old."

Evon's stomach churned and she tasted bile. She told herself it was motion sickness. She often felt sick in aeroplanes. Her eyes filled with tears. Fuck! She was going to cry. No. No, she wasn't. She was ice. She bit her lip hard and tasted blood in her mouth.

"Please, don't send me back."

"It's too late." Evon stuck the piece of dowel in the door to stop Rose from locking herself in. "You've got five minutes," Evon said. She could barely speak but she wasn't crying. She was strong.

After four minutes, Rose emerged. Evon saw that the flight attendant was talking to Bell again. She was smiling and playing with her hair.

Evon escorted Rose back to her seat and they both sat down. The flight attendant moved away. Evon tried to forget what Rose had said. She wouldn't think about it. "Another fan, Bell?"

"No, not a fan. Just a nice girl. An Aquarian. I always get on well with Aquarians. I was just explaining that we needed plastic utensils for our meal and asking for some extra water. It's important we don't get dehydrated. I was also complimenting her on her perfume. I love Tommy Girl." He sounded his usual composed, easy going self. He hadn't heard what Rose had said. He didn't know.

The movie was one that Evon had already seen. She watched it without putting on the headphones. Bell stood in the galley with the flight attendants. She heard them laughing.

Rose looked at her. "He watches you all the time. You are a challenge to him."

Evon forced herself to look at Rose. Her face blurred and morphed under Evon's gaze. Evon could imagine her as a twelve year old with round eyes and braided hair. She forced the image away. "We don't even like each other let alone anything else."

"You can't even say the word 'love' can you?" Rose rubbed her wrists which were red from the cuffs.

"Of course I can."

"Then say it."

"Love, love, love."

"That's not what I mean." Rose caught hold of Evon's wrist with both hands.

"What is this tattoo?"

"A mistake." She tried to get her wrist free but Rose had a tight grip and Evon didn't want to make a scene.

"This tattoo is love. Maybe you are changing?"

"I don't feel well," Evon said. "Let's not talk anymore. Why don't you watch the movie?" Evon gave Rose a set of headphones. "There you go." She pulled the in-flight magazine out of the pocket in the seat in front of her and opened it up. She tried to concentrate on doing the cryptic crossword.

Bell came back and sat down. He took Evon's crossword off her. He filled in a clue which Evon had missed. "I can't believe you couldn't do this one."

"I left it for you." Evon managed to fake a light-hearted tone of voice. "I thought you needed to develop your cryptic crossword capacity."

"I'm great at cryptics. I love puzzles." He filled in another clue. "Are you all right, Evon? You seem shaken?"

"I'm scared of flying."

"That surprises me. You don't seem the type."

Evon just shrugged. "You don't know what type I am. You don't know me well enough."

"You're right, Evon. You are a bit of a puzzle."

"I'm very simple."

“No, you’re not. You intrigue me. Hey, you said you had nightmares, once, at the Palace. Tell me one. After all, you know all about my glass lady dream.”

“There’s really nothing to tell.”

“Yes, right!” He doodled a snowflake on the magazine. “You’re very hard to get to know. Two years we’ve worked together and I still know nothing about you. What sort of movies do you like? Do you have any hobbies? Do you have siblings? Where do your parents live? What’s your favourite food?”

“I like science fiction. I don’t have any hobbies. I don’t have any siblings. My mother is dead. My dad is gone. I like to eat spaghetti.”

“So, now we’re getting somewhere! Don’t you feel better now,” Bell said. “We’ve achieved a new level of intimacy.”

“No, we haven’t,” Evon said. “I made that all up.” The lights went out. The flight attendants went down the rows handing out blankets and pulling down the blinds.

“It was true,” Bell said. “I’m a compliance officer. I know when I’m being lied to.”

“Evidently not.”

“Evidently, so.” Bell stuck the magazine back in the seat pocket. “You can sleep,” he said. “I’m not tired. I’ll wake you up if anything happens.”

“Okay.” She closed her eyes.

The cyclone of snow surrounded her. She stared upwards and saw a pale white disc—the sky, hardly distinguishable from the snow. The cyclone swirled and hissed past her ears. Evon heard whispering. The insistent susurrations were like the whirring of a drill bit, cutting into her brain, slicing her consciousness to pieces. “Stop!” She held out her hands to try to stop the cyclone. The spinning ice sliced into her skin. The cyclone blushed red with her blood. She was surrounded by blood.

Evon opened her eyes. It was dark. Rose had fallen asleep and her head was on Evon’s shoulder. Someone had put blankets over both of them. Bell was listening to music on his iPhone. Most of the other passengers were asleep. “How long was I sleeping?”

Bell turned off his music. “What?”

“How long was I asleep?” Rose’s head seemed very heavy on Evon’s shoulder.

“Quite a while. We’ll arrive in an hour. It’s nearly over.”

“Yes. I’m glad.” Evon propped Rose up in her seat. “She hasn’t been as much trouble as I expected.”

“Sometimes they just accept it once they leave Australian air space.” He tucked the blanket around Rose.

“Do you remember that Chinese guy who deliberately pissed in his pants at the airport and we missed the plane?”

“Yes. We took him out the next day wearing plastic trousers duct-taped around the ankles.”

“I hate doing the escort work,” Evon said.

Rose lay quietly between them. Her face a perfect mask. She was very beautiful and very still.

“Compliance work is very challenging. It’s not for everyone.” He sighed. “You get bitter and cynical doing this work. You start to think everyone is lying to you. You become the job and it destroys your trust in people.”

“Even you?”

“Even me.” Bell leant close, over Rose, and showed Evon his wrist. “Can I see yours?”

She showed him.

“They’re not the same,” he said. “Did you know that?”

“I thought they were.” She looked closely at his tattoo. His wrist shook slightly so she held it. His skin was very warm. A white snowflake. At the centre of the snowflake, a tiny red and yellow sun. “They’re opposite, Daniel.”

“Like us.” His face was close to hers. His breath smelled like mint and he was wearing a lemony aftershave.

She couldn’t stop her eyes closing. It was as if she were falling asleep. As if she were dreaming. “Yes. Like us.”

His lips touched hers, the softest pressure imaginable. Warm and very gentle.

The lights came on. Evon blinked and they drew apart.

"I'm sorry," Bell said. "I don't know—"

"It's okay." She tried to smile but her lips were not cooperative. "It doesn't mean anything. We're just tired and not thinking straight." She remembered her promise to Tess. She wouldn't leave her. Not ever.

The flight attendant's voice came over the PA. "We are now making our final approach. Please ensure that seat belts are fastened and all seats are in the upright position—"

Bell came back to his seat. He'd been briefing the captain on how the removal was progressing. "I told him that everything is fine and under control. Thanked him for his help."

Evon found it hard to look at him. The kiss wasn't easily forgotten. She felt strange, as if she were unraveling, falling apart, melting. "Good." She put her seat upright and collected up her stuff: her drink bottle, her notebook, her chewing gum. She pushed her tray out of the way. Rose hadn't moved. Still asleep. She gave her a nudge with her elbow.

Bell picked up the equipment bag and stuffed it into an overhead locker. "It'll be nice to take a look around before we catch the next flight back. I've never been to Africa before. Have you?"

"No. Never." What was with Rose? It was too late to be difficult now. "Rose, wake up." Evon saw that Rose had dropped her lollypop. A coca cola flavoured lollypop.

Bell sat down. "Everything okay?"

"Yes. No. I don't know."

The flight attendant came over. "Madam, you need to do up your seat belt. And this lady needs to put her seat in the upright position."

"Yes, I know. Rose, come on! Stop stuffing around." Evon's stomach churned. She felt nauseous. "Bell, she's not waking up." Evon shook Rose's shoulder. "Wake up!" No response. "Bell, she won't wake up! Rose!" Evon felt her heart beat hard. She couldn't suck in enough air to breathe. "Rose! Rose!"

"Rose, wake up!" Bell pulled the blanket off. "Rose!"

Rose lay back with her wrists crossed neatly against her chest. She still wore Evon's creamy white jumper. It was bright arterial red.

Chapter seventeen

“Didn’t you search her?” The Territory Director, Juan, was a compact man with a very fine moustache and an immaculate dress sense. Evon and Bell had been in his office for the last two hours.

“We did a pat down search,” Bell said. “It’s all the regulations permit. She must have concealed the blade internally and retrieved it when she went to the bathroom.”

“We had no cause to believe that she might self harm,” Evon said. “She’d been cooperative virtually the whole time.” She felt like she had said this a hundred times. She knew she would say it a hundred times more.

“Well, there will be a proper investigation. The outcome might not be good for you. Perhaps you should give some thought to your future here. Understood?”

“Yes, sir.” Bell stood up. “And, sir, I’m resigning. I’ve been offered a position working with the UN in Eritrea.”

“I understand.” Juan shook Bell’s hand. “I wish you luck with it.”

*

Bell drove Evon to the detention centre. "Why do you want to visit Raven?"

"I just do."

They sat in silence. A Christmas tree deodoriser hung from the heater switch. The stench of pine filled the car with a fug as thick as jelly. "I hate these things!" Evon threw it out the window.

"It was my fault," Bell said.

Evon thought he was talking about the Christmas tree. "It doesn't matter."

"I should have realised. She was so still and quiet. I thought she was sleeping."

Evon realised he was talking about Rose. She remembered how Bell had kissed her. They had bent over Rose and their lips had touched. And Rose had been dying.

"You know, there's something I'd like to ask you," Bell said. "It's something I don't understand. When Rose died, you said something—"

"I was confused," Evon said. "I was just panicking."

"You said that you should have let her go. Why did you say that?"

Evon looked away from him. She stared at the pale blue sky. "It felt wrong."

"It was wrong. We both know that."

"How do we make it right?" Evon said.

“We can’t.”

“When are you leaving?” Evon asked.

“In a week.” The afternoon light slanted in through the windscreen and fell on his face, gilding it. “I think I can do some good working for the UN.”

“You’d do good anywhere.”

“Not with immigration. I don’t belong there.”

“Who does?” She felt like crying but her face wouldn’t move. She was carved from ancient ice, from a glacier. Hard. Indurate. Eternal.

Bell stopped outside the detention centre. “Why don’t you come with me.” His face was close to hers and his eyes shone a warm blue, like the sea in summer. “We could do some good together.”

“I know, but I have Robert and Tess.” She got out the car but hesitated before shutting the door. “Thanks for the lift.”

“Do you want me to wait for you?”

She reminded herself that she was ice. “No. But, thank you.”

“Well, you know where to find me. If you ever need anything.”

She looked at him closely. His lips were curved into a tiny smile, a kind smile. Warm. Her eyes stung a little and she rubbed them hard. Her tears felt gritty, like sand, and there was a pain in her chest. “Don’t.”

“Don’t what?”

She shook her head, gathering herself to speak, but she couldn't say anything that would make it easier. "I have to go." She shut the car door and walked away.

Raven sat opposite her. He sat very straight and his face was impassive. His eyes were closed.

"I'm sorry," Evon said. Tears threatened to overwhelm her but she fought them back. "I'm so sorry." The guards were standing outside the door. She could hear them chatting, discussing the football.

A sound came from deep in Raven's throat. For a second, she thought he was going to speak to her, but he didn't. He moaned. It was a dreadful sound. A deep groaning that raised the hairs on Evon's forearms. Then he fell silent. He opened his eyes and stared at her, his eyes wet.

She stared at him, her heart beating hard. She didn't know what she was feeling. A terrible pain ripped through her ribs and struck at her chest. Dimly, she realised that she was crying. And she couldn't stop.

Raven took her hand. He opened her fingers and gave her a bead, laid it on her palm and closed her fingers around it. A rose carved from obsidian. Evon held it and understood it was the last memory. The one she didn't want.

"I don't understand." Evon stared at the video cabinet. It was full of science fiction videos. Her Dad's collection. After more than ten years, it was still there. Mum had never packed Dad's things away. Was she still waiting for him to come back? "Why

can't I contact him? I just want to ask him why he left. Why he never tried to see me. I want to ask him adult-to-adult."

"Evon, I have to tell you something. I should have told you a long time ago but I was just so ashamed. I couldn't talk about it. I wanted to wait until you were old enough. Now that you're sixteen, I think you have the maturity to understand," Mum sat so close that Evon could smell the astringent scent of the cleansers they used at the surgery. "He wasn't your father, Evon."

Evon's mind refused to process the sentence. It made no sense. "What?"

"That's why he left."

"But he left because of the dream."

"That's insane. It's not funny anymore." Mum inhaled slowly then exhaled. "He always wondered why I couldn't get pregnant again. We wanted more children but they never came along. He went to get a sperm count done and his sperm count was zero. When they did some tests they found out that he had a congenital deformity of the vas deferens."

"What?" Evon's brain was working in slow motion. "I don't understand."

"He was sterile."

"Maybe he became sterile after I was born. Something could have happened. Radiation or something. I don't know. You're the doctor." She couldn't stop her tone sounding resentful, accusatory. This was Mum's fault.

"No, he was born with the problem. He was always sterile. Anyway, he should have known. It's obvious really."

Mum was so calm, so matter-of-fact. Evon stared at her mother hard. Mum's face was smooth, her skin pale and transparent. There were the faintest of lines around her eyes, as fine as web. Did she feel anything? "Why should he have known?"

"Both your Dad and I have blue eyes. That means you should have blue eyes, Evon. Not brown."

"Who is my father?"

"I went to the US for a conference. A medical conference. I met a man there—"

"You cheated on him!"

"It wasn't like that. It just a one off. It was a moment in time. It's hard to explain, Evon."

"What was the name of this man? Who was he?"

"Your Dad and I had tried for nine years to get pregnant. Nine years! I don't know what I was thinking, really. I thought your Dad would never know. I was so desperate and—"

"How could you do this? How could you do this to me? Who was the man, Mum? Who was he?"

"I don't know. I don't remember. It doesn't even matter."

"You don't even know who he was? What sort of a person are you?"

“Evon, listen to me. I loved your father. I miss your Dad so much. I think of him every moment. I dream about him at night. I still love him. If I could undo what I did, I would.” She grabbed Evon’s hand. “I love your father.”

“You’d undo it? You mean, you’d ‘undo’ me!” Evon felt like hitting her. She didn’t know what was worse. That her mother wanted her ‘undone’ or that Evon didn’t even know her own father. “He’s not my father,” Evon said. Anger twisted in her gut like a giant hungry eel. Anger transformed into something darker. “I hate you!” She pushed her mother hard. “I wish you’d just die!”

That night Evon dreamt that she was walking over a narrow bridge that spanned an ocean. The water glowed a savage white, as if illuminated from below, by a sub-aquatic sun. She turned around and behind her walked three young girls, about her age, perhaps eighteen or so. They were all dressed in black and wore solemn expressions.

At the end of the bridge, there was a silhouetted figure. Behind her, the land blossomed, green and turquoise, emerald and gold. Evon walked up to the figure. It was her mother. “Get out of my way,” Evon said. “I have to get past you.”

“Go back,” her mother said.

Evon was filled with anger then pure hatred. It wasn’t smooth and black and impervious. It was like liquid fire, terrifying and uncontrollable, sweeping through her like a bushfire. Her mother had driven her father away. Her mother had obliterated her father, leaving Evon with nothing.

"Get away from me." She pushed her mother in the chest. Her mother screamed as if she had been burnt. A huge flower blossomed from her chest. Then another. Until flowers covered her torso. Black roses.

When she'd woken, she'd found a stone in each hand. Black and glassy stones. Vicious and oily. Hate.

"Six months later my mother died of breast cancer," Evon said. Her voice was hoarse. Her lips felt swollen and the skin on her face felt stiff. "And I dreamed it. I thought that I'd made it happen. I hated her for what she'd done to me. I thought it was my fault that my dreams could kill." Evon thought of Rose. She thought of her mother's death. Of her father's departure. Of Bell. She opened her brief case and took out the pad of bridging visa E forms. She granted Raven a visa for one hundred years. She gave him the right to work and to study. It was a lawful decision. It would hold up in court. There was nothing in migration law that prevented her from doing it though she knew the department would fight it to the end. She pressed her knuckles against her closed eyes. What if Raven couldn't be trusted? What if he wanted revenge? He was a free man now. What would he do with that freedom? What would he do now that his sister was dead?

She remembered how she had stood at the window of the office and stared out across the lake. She'd imagined that the window had shattered, that glass had floated through the air, very slowly, spinning and tumbling as if suspended in zero gee. She imagined dark smoke spreading across the office ceiling, flowing like lava. And on the floor. The detritus of office life. Shredded papers. A magnet

shaped like a crab. A computer keyboard, its keys scattered. A whiteboard marker. A picture of a child. And there amongst the debris, something dark. Something small and angular with a dull ebony shine: a bead shaped like a black bird.

She opened her eyes. It could happen but it probably wouldn't. Somehow, though, in her mind, releasing Raven was like destroying the department. It set her free. Even though she knew she'd lose her job. In fact she would hand in her resignation in the morning.

She called the guards back in. "I've just granted this client a visa. He has to be released immediately."

*

Evon went into the living room and sat down. It was daylight but the curtains were drawn and the room was dark. Robert was still at work and Tess was at kindy. Evon turned on the Liberator lamp then turned it off again. She stared dully at the pale cream carpet, the white walls, the beige furniture and the glass coffee tables. There was no colour in the room. The central heating hadn't come on yet and it was icy cold in the house. Somehow, she felt too inert, too drained to get up and switch it on. She remembered a time, long ago, when Bell had dropped her off home from work. He'd come in for a coffee and looked around. The first thing he'd said was "Why aren't there any photographs?" It was true. There wasn't a single photo to be seen. It was like her family didn't exist. Like they were dream objects.

The problem with dream objects was that you could never be certain that they were solidus and not faders. You could keep a dream object in a box, very carefully stored, wrapped up in tissue, for a year or two years, even for ten years or more. Then, one day you open the box, unwrap the tissue and nothing was there. Not even an indent or an impression of what had been there. Nothing.

She thought of Raven. What would he do now? She wished he had spoken to her. Even a single word. His silence had been impenetrable until he had uttered that sound, that terrible sound that had pierced her to the quick. It was as if his grief had purged her of her own emptiness. As if her mind had been an empty vacuum flask that had come undone with a pop and a rush of air.

She picked up her mobile phone and scrolled through the menu. Bell was right at the top. Her thumb rested on the little green phone symbol but she didn't press the button. Instead, she just put the phone back in her pocket and waited for her family to come home. Soon, she heard the door open and Tess's voice rang out: "Mummy! You're back!" She came running into the lounge room and threw her arms around Evon's neck. "I'm so glad you're back."

"Yes." Evon buried her face in Tess's soft hair. "Here I am."

"Are you okay?" Robert stopped by the window and swept the curtains open. Amber sunshine washed into the room, tinting the cream carpet gold, and spraying a shower of rainbows against the wall. Evon blinked in the strong light, her eyes watering. "Yes. I'm fine." The sunlight slid over her skin like melting butter, warm and creamy, smoothing away her goosebumps.

Tess pulled away and put one hand on each of Evon's cheeks. "You're crying, Mummy. Did you get hurt? Did you get hit with a saucepan again?"

Evon shook her head. "No. I'm home and safe. I've avoided the saucepans."

Robert sat down next to her and put an arm around her. He put his mouth close to her ear and whispered. "I think you *are* crying. Are you upset?"

"No, I'm not. I feel perfectly normal." Suddenly, Evon caught a glimpse of herself and her family reflected in the top of the glass coffee table. The three of them, together, their arms around each other, washed in gold light. She leant closer to Robert. He smelled of fresh air and popcorn. "Actually, I'm not sure how I feel."

Robert kissed her ear. "Maybe you're happy."

Evon studied herself in the reflection, a woman with dark hair and chocolate brown eyes. She wasn't happy. Not yet. But, she knew that one day, she would be.

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